Gerald A. Arbuckle

Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians

A Postmodern Critique

VISIT…

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"Combining his immense learning in anthropology and theology with his deep concern for the Christian faith Arbuckle again puts all of us scholars and church leaders in his debt with this splendid volume. With his characteristically limpid prose and thought-provoking insights our prolific author forces us to rethink entirely the relation between faith and culture in our postmodern age. This is a landmark book and the future of Christianity and Christian mission may well depend on how its proposals are taken seriously and put into practice."

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Theology Department, Georgetown University

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Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians

A Postmodern Critique

Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM

Foreword by Anthony Gittins, CSSp

A Michael Glazier Book

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two creative and faith-inspired anthropologists.

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Foreword

It is a pleasure to introduce this book by Gerald Arbuckle, a friend and respected colleague. Having discussed with him some of the ideas behind and within the following pages, and particularly now since having read it, it is quite apparent to me not only how difficult this enterprise has been for the author but that it has indeed been a labor of love. Writing from within one's primary discipline (here, social anthropology), but addressing readers from a different primary discipline (here, theology) runs the risk that what one writes can be interpreted as condescending or frankly incomprehensible. Significantly different disciplines develop their own jargon or *patois* independently until they hardly share a common language any longer, however much the practitioners of each may fail to realize it. For that reason, this book may be no less difficult a read for the scholar or student than writing it has been for the author. After all, readers need to understand more than the constituent words: some unfamiliar ideas or concepts must also be assimilated, familiar usages or phrases must be reevaluated, and relationships among all of these must be grasped if the reader is to receive what the writer wishes to offer.

The serious reader of *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians* will surely be rewarded for attentive perseverance, and the book's final chapters will clarify many ideas adumbrated in the earlier part of the book. However, to skip the earlier chapters and move directly to the final ones would be quite ill advised: the book builds systematically, so that the last four chapters require the understanding accumulated from the assimilation of earlier ideas and themes.

The structure and rationale underlying the book can perhaps be identified here. The opening chapter characterizes *culture* as one of the most intractable concepts in the language. A plethora of definitions have contested the field, none of which has won universal approval. Nevertheless, these definitions can be systematized by placing them in one of three categories: classicist, modern, and postmodern. Simply put, classicist definitions understand culture as a single entity, best and most clearly seen perhaps—ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome notwithstanding—in what

was deemed the very finest of (Victorian) European achievement in the arts and sciences, expressed in terms of civilized behavior or refinement (though there could be and was disagreement about where and what those achievements might actually include and what "refinement" might entail).

By contrast, modern definitions acknowledge that a plurality, indeed, a multiplicity of cultures can be found diachronically (historically) and synchronically (across the globe at any given time). These definitions, moreover, assume that such particular or discrete cultures are homogeneous, stable, enduring, and bounded by or clearly delimited from adjacent cultures. More recently, postmodernity has introduced or encountered rather different views: now cultures are seen to be much more frangible or fluid, inconsistent and flawed as previously admitted, as well as mutually interactive, internally contested, and indeed always prone to entropy, viral diseases, and even breakdown, as history attests.

When commenting on human culture, much contemporary theological language still adopts an uncritical and even naïve classicist view despite the fact that social and cultural anthropologists and sociologists, whose subject of inquiry is human culture, have seriously reworked earlier inadequate understandings of the subject, based on their increased and cumulative empirical research. Therefore if the church and Christian ministers are to encounter, communicate with, and prove in any way relevant to the people of myriad different cultures today they must adjust their understanding of cultural dynamics lest their best efforts prove ineffective and unworkable.

If the basic question is "how can the Good News of Jesus Christ engage with humanity?" then, given the multiplicity of human cultures and the fact that to be human is to have and to participate in culture, social and cultural contexts must be carefully identified and studied so that people can be approached and encountered appropriately. Otherwise the consequences may be dire, if indeed there are any significant consequences. We are all familiar with the observation—currently most loudly voiced by Pentecostals in Latin America—that over the past half millennium millions of people have been baptized Catholic, yet many have never been or are not yet truly Christian. In contemporary theological language, the faith has not been truly inculturated because it has not truly encountered people in their everyday cultural reality and become embedded in their lives and experience.

This book represents a timely attempt to equip theologians and pastoral workers with an appropriate understanding of the dynamics of

culture and inculturation and to provide them with some well-designed and effective analytical tools. The bulk of the book looks at culture under different lenses or from different perspectives. After the opening chapter, which explicates *classicist*, *modern*, and *postmodern* understandings, we are taken for a walk through the forest of postmodern anthropology and invited to look in turn at cultures as webs of symbolic and mythical meaning (Chapter 2), as systems of order and classification (Chapter 3) and boundary-maintaining (Chapter 4), as matrices for identity formation (Chapter 5), as orchestrations of human life (Chapter 6), and as systems for negotiating differences (Chapter 7). These chapters establish the theoretical foundations on which the concrete understanding and practical action of theologians and pastoral agents in specific contexts can build. They embody a wide range of concepts, all of which are helpful hints and some of which are essential learning for anyone committed to the engagement of the Good News of Jesus Christ (Gospel) with actual groups of people (societies) in their enormous organizational diversity (cultures).

The field of theoretical linguistics has also developed a number of ideas that fit very well with anthropological and, indeed, theological attempts to understand culture. One is "rule-governed creativity," which sounds at first like an oxymoron. Noam Chomsky (b. 1927) famously "reduced" the English language to a base of some 150 rules. Familiarity with this very finite number of rules and with the creative ways in which they can be applied within the legitimate linguistic parameters allows anyone to generate a virtually infinite number of utterances (spoken or written sequences), including many that had never been formulated before in exactly the same way (like any of the sentences on this page). Other people, hearing or reading such utterances or sentences for the first time, can actually—by virtue of their own knowledge of English grammar and syntax—understand them quite easily and routinely. This is truly amazing. People do not operate like automata but—in theory at least, aware of the "rules" of their own culture and the consequences of breaking them—are able to be creative, innovative, disobedient, or destructive. A grasp of the principles of "rule-governed creativity" provides an interpretive tool for outsiders, whether anthropologists, theologians, or other interested parties.

Applied to culture generally, the principle of "rule-governed creativity" might illustrate how those who share a common culture can communicate not only in traditional or conventional (familiar), but also in groundbreaking and creative (new) modes. Yet not every communication is or needs

to be perfect in order to be effective, and cultures too can survive reasonably well in a less than perfect world. Linguists contrast three modes or levels of intelligibility: the grammatical, the acceptable, and the meaningful. *Grammaticality* is the most standard and widely applied test, but not everything grammatical is meaningful or comprehensible. Again, Chomsky's famous (and grammatically perfect!) utterance, "colorless green ideas sleep furiously," is quite meaningless! A cautionary tale, this, for theological propositions or theses that might be perfectly orthodox doctrinally ("grammatical") and yet meaningless, incomprehensible, or irrelevant to "the (non-theologically-adept) faithful."

A second measure of communicability is *acceptability*. "I don't have no money" is ungrammatical by the criteria of Standard English, but it makes perfect sense to most English speakers (those with an intuitive understanding of the language). It is *acceptable*, and to deny that would be pedantic. Likewise, a three-year-old's "my foots are hurting," while not syntactically correct, can be both understandable and very *acceptable* to a proud mother's ears. *Meaningfulness* is the third criterion of intelligibility. If someone explains, "I put the thingummajig inside the big square whatsit, next to the—you know what I mean," there may be absolutely no need for further clarification because context and native understanding simply supply what is grammatically lacking. In short, a culture need not function perfectly—by virtue of people keeping all the laws or conventions at all times—in order to qualify as a working or functioning culture.

Notions of grammaticality, acceptability, and meaningfulness can be helpfully applied as interpretive keys. The language of theoretical linguistics can illustrate the fact that cultures can tolerate a certain number of less-than-perfect "grammatical" forms so long as they generate behaviors that are *acceptable* or *meaningful*, and so long as the members of a given social group are able to discriminate between what is minimally acceptable and what is simply intolerable. Theologically, this would be to acknowledge that cultures (all cultures) rather like people (all people) are a mixture, an amalgam, of sin and grace. But to compare the grace in one's own culture with the sin in another is simply unfair and unjust; we must understand cultures by comparing and contrasting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors that are comparable, acknowledging that there may be some elements that are strictly incommensurable and therefore must be understood on their own terms and not as a degraded form of something with which we are familiar and of which we approve (or disapprove) in our own culture. Before attempting to judge another culture and its people,

therefore, any and every student needs to appropriate the criteria of cultural grammaticality, acceptability, and meaningfulness.

Another way of understanding a culture is to see it as a meaning-making system. Despite initial appearances to outsiders, no surviving culture (society) acts irrationally and meaninglessly for long; to do so would be to sow the seeds of its own demise. Therefore, however imperfect and inconsistent any given culture may be, as a social organism it is always struggling to make and maintain meaning. Meaning is socially (and not simply individually) created: mental institutions are filled with isolated individuals, many of whom think they live in a meaningful world, but because they are alone in that world they are unable to live in society ("the real world"). When encountering another culture, any outsider should attempt—and not by guesswork—to understand, if not to enter, the prevailing world of meaning, and *then* to look at the world through the lenses discovered there. At least this shows some respect for the culture of others; at best it provides a platform for continuing dialogue.

Two other points impinge on the topic of cultural analysis or interpretation: the nature of *muted groups* and the matter of *representation*. Every culture, by virtue of its being a human development or creation, is imperfect. Social equality at many levels may or may not be espoused by the whole society but is virtually impossible to achieve, due to vested interests, whether of individuals or groups and whether consciously or unconsciously pursued. One consequence is that not everyone in a society has a social voice, or not everyone's voice is equally acknowledged or listened to. "Muted groups" are those classes or categories of people whose voices are not heard, either because they are effectively silenced or because they are not allowed to be raised. Theologians must look for the muted groups in any society and identify why they are muted and by whom: the reign or realm of God does not tolerate muted groups, though every society does in fact create or tolerate some.

"Representation" refers simply to the question of who speaks for whom, and how effectively it is done. If women represent themselves and articulate their insights and interests, their "representation" will be rather different from what is articulated when certain designated men "speak for" women and "represent" their voices and interests. And so on. Questions for theologians include: who, in the church, represents whom; who speaks on behalf of whom; who is effectively muted; how well various constituencies are actually represented by their representatives, however designated; and whether actual or intentional *mis*representation occurs. The institutional church is always limited, as well as positively served, by

the culture in which it is incarnated. But failure to acknowledge this can contribute negatively to the coming of God's reign. Sensitivity to and respect for cultural facts such as muted groups and representation is something Gerald Arbuckle's book is designed to foster.

This book stimulates many more thoughts, but it may be helpful at this juncture simply to emphasize a number of Gerald Arbuckle's many insights, lest some of them slip by, their significance unnoticed. I will take one from each of the last four chapters—the chapters that bring theory into an encounter with pastoral and anthropological practice and present insights and concrete challenges for theology and theologians.

Chapter 7 explores aspects of multiculturalism, a polysemic and confusing term. But, after describing its sometimes inconsistent applications, Arbuckle helps us look at some of its most important features as far as theologians are concerned: multiethnic groups within a single country or nation, and subcultures within a single identifiable culture. The treatment is highly nuanced and informative, and the author alerts us to the (ab)use of power in multicultural contexts. He then poses a number of pertinent questions that theologians would need to address in any attempt to foster inculturation in practice.

Chapter 8, perhaps the most immediately relevant chapter in the whole book, is an exposition of the thesis that all religions are necessarily embodied and expressed culturally, and an effort to tease out some of the theological and ecclesial implications of this. The examples are particularly telling, as is the conclusion: "This is a time rich in potentiality for refounding the church through the passionate collaborative efforts of people in touch with the hopes and anxieties of [others] who possess boundless faith, imagination, and creativity to bring the Gospel alive within this postmodern world. Conditions could not be better."

Chapter 9 scrutinizes ecclesial documents and other theological writings, exposing the manifest or latent understandings of the word "culture" therein. A quotation from Bernard Lonergan is very much to the point: "When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature," rather than on how it is to relate to a changing world.

There are trenchant comments on some of the assumptions and demands of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Vatican II document on the liturgy, especially in regard to the much-quoted "noble simplicity of the Roman Rite" that, rather like democracy, may be quite inappropriate for many cultures in the contemporary world that struggle mightily under the weight of this universal liturgical requirement. The author also con-

tests the phrase "liturgical inculturation," judging it inadequate to describe what is in principle (in sociological terminology) acculturation. Karl Rahner's respect for the integrity of cultures led him to make the following telling prediction: "There will no longer be any one single and universal basic formula of the Christian faith applicable to the whole Church and, indeed, prescribed for her as authoritatively binding." And here is an oft-quoted and devastating criticism from Paul Tillich: "The tragedy of the Roman Catholic Church [is] its way of dealing with culture [which is] the result of its unwillingness to subject itself to the judgment of this event [i. e., the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ]."

Chapter 10 explores the notion that inculturation is a "dialectical interaction between Christian faith and cultures." Having argued that the world of Jesus fits far better within a postmodern than a modern understanding of culture, the author provides very telling examples of the pastoral (and cultural) strategy of Jesus. This chapter is vintage Arbuckle—excellent anthropology and fine pastoral and practical theology. Finally, Chapter 11 concludes the book with a friendly but serious challenge to theologians to engage seriously with the anthropological aspects of inculturation. Gerald Arbuckle examines some of the most significant recent theological works, offers some interpretation and constructive criticism, and identifies the significance—and limitations—of syncretism as a component of authentic inculturation.

In offering this foreword, I very much hope that this thoughtful, insightful, timely and wise book will help to further the dialogue between theologians and interested anthropologists, for the glory of God and the good of God's people.

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Introduction

> The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time. . . . [Every] effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization . . . of cultures.
>
> —Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*[1]

> Demonising postmodernism is not the appropriate response from a mature Christianity.
>
> —Daniel O'Leary, *Begin With the Heart*[2]

The most powerful challenge to the church in recent decades is the above no-nonsense statement of Paul VI in 1975. John Paul II repeated the challenge in 1982 with even sharper urgency: "I have considered the church's dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake."[3] Inculturation is the term that describes this dialogue. But how a challenge is defined and then explained inevitably affects what is actually done about it. Inaccurate perceptions of and defective attitudes to cultures and dialogue invariably result in bad theology as well as defective pastoral policies and practices. This book particularly focuses on

1. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization) (Sydney: St Paul Publications, 1982), 25.

2. Daniel O'Leary, *Begin With the Heart: Recovering a Sacrament of Vision* (Dublin: Columba, 2008), 148.

3. John Paul II, Letter to Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, *Osservatore Romano* (English ed.) (28 June 1982), 7.

clarifying the meaning of culture because an accurate understanding of the concept is crucial to effective inculturation.[4]

In 1989 missiologist Father Robert Schreiter, CPPS, complained that the challenge of bridging the gap between faith and cultures had remained largely unmet and in fact the process was going backwards in some areas.[5] Twenty years later, despite the frequent references to inculturation and its importance by ecclesiastical authorities and theologians, the situation has become worse. Few are seriously taking up the challenge to enter into realistic dialogue with the cultures of our time, and there are deliberate movements to reject inculturation entirely.[6]

Schreiter suggests two reasons for this impasse. There are no adequate methodologies among theologians "to break through the conceptual logjams, and [there is a] lack of tools that can be used readily and easily" by practitioners. Second, there is the official unwillingness at the international and local levels of the church "to permit legitimate experiments in inculturation and to sanction successful experiments for ongoing use."[7] I detect a third reason, namely a revitalized fundamentalist view that the study of culture(s) is unimportant for evangelization, that it is even a waste of time, and that all we need to do is preach the Good News just as Jesus Christ did in his time! Yet inculturation is a fundamental imperative of the Gospel itself. In fact, Jesus Christ was extremely sensitive in his preaching to the cultures of his day. As the master of inculturation, he knew that his message had to penetrate to the "very roots"[8] of cultures.

As a cultural anthropologist, I believe the thorniest methodological problem in inculturation is the confusion surrounding the meaning of culture. The concept of culture is contentious and complex. Anyone who writes today on culture is confronted with a disheartening task, because the word is applied indiscriminately to vastly different situations. So we read about "global culture," "youth culture," "pop culture," "postmodern

4. The meaning of "inculturation" is fully defined in chaps. 10 and 11.

5. See Robert J. Schreiter, "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 758.

6. Neil Ormerod, "A Dialectic Engagement with the Social Sciences in an Ecclesiological Context," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 816, concludes his review of theological views on social sciences: "In general, the engagement with social sciences by ecclesiologists has been eclectic, sporadic, intermittent, and secondary to what they view as their primary task."

7. Ibid.

8. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 25.

culture," "cafe culture," "gun culture," "corporate culture," "print culture," "transnational culture," "culture of violence," "culture of poverty," "culture wars." Rarely is any serious thought given to what these expressions mean. Politicians employ the word to rationalize their anti-immigrant policies and indigenous activists use it to legitimate their rights to particular expressions of identity and property. Management texts commonly define it simplistically as "what we do around here," yet culture is far more complex than this. Given this widespread and arbitrary use of the term culture, Raymond Williams, the well-known British cultural historian, once expressed the frustration of many people when he wrote: "I don't know how many times I've wished that I'd never heard the damned word."[9]

Culture: Seismic Shifts in Meaning

This frustrating confusion and lack of precision about how to define the term is not surprising because even cultural anthropologists, whose specialist task is the study of cultures, are questioning their traditional use of the word. Until the 1980s most anthropologists accepted the modern description of cultures as discrete entities, frozen in time, homogeneous and without internal dissent, unreceptive to outside influences. Yet now in these postmodern times it is clear that cultures simply do not fit this description. Every culture is fragmented to some degree or other, internally contested, its borders permeable. There is no such thing as a "pure" culture: never has been, never will be. Cultures are hybrid, constantly interacting, mixing, and changing.[10] With globalization this process is intensifying so that happenings in one part of the world are being shaped by events developing many miles away and vice versa.[11] At the same time, in reaction to the uncertainties evoked by globalization, new nationalist and fundamentalist movements are appearing everywhere. People confronted with chaos feel the need to belong behind clearly defined identifying borders.

9. Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 125.

10. See Sheila G. Daveney, "Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis," in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, eds. Delwin Brown, Sheila G. Davaney, Kathryn Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

11. See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 64.

Theological Reactions

The wide confusion about the meaning of culture is mirrored in ecclesial documents and the writings of theologians. Sometimes it is applied in a classicist sense to stand for the intellectual, artistic, and spiritual achievements of a people. More commonly in recent decades it is used according to its modern meaning, namely, that a culture is a homogeneous and integrated whole. The crucial postmodern insights into cultures such as their polyphonic, fragmentary, and hybrid qualities, and their internal struggles for power, are not being recognized. Sadly, if we continue to accept the modern definition of culture we are trying to dialogue with something that does not exist!

In ecclesial texts there is also no awareness of the major problem that the culture of the institutional church is itself Eurocentric, a grave barrier to the development of a vibrant multicultural church as envisioned by Vatican II. The church in fact is today a multilingual and multicultural community, with its center of vitality and growth in Latin America, Africa and Asia, not in Europe and North America.

The third obstacle to inculturation, namely, a fundamentalist denial of the importance of culture in evangelization, is a return to the pre-Vatican II rejection of the world, which holds that cultures have nothing to teach us and get in the way of evangelization. Since fundamentalism is an emotion-driven, simplistic solution to complex issues, this dogmatism is difficult, if not impossible, to dialogue with.[12] I first met this type of fundamentalism among theologians and practitioners shortly after the end of the Vatican Council. Using supportive arguments from the council's documents, I approached a superior general of a congregation about the need to train his men for ministry in foreign countries. He sharply responded: "No, I have finished with theories. All we need are more men and more money!" Later, with an internationally known economist, I had to review sociodevelopment projects that had been started by members of the superior general's congregation in several Third World countries. Wherever we went we met failures, leaving local people angry and most missionaries despondent or broken men. All this was the result of a devastating lack of anthropological knowledge of cultures. I asked one zealous missionary if he had received any formal training in the local culture. He paused and then broke into tears: "When I first came to this remote island I asked the bishop, 'How can I best know the local

12. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 195–201.

culture?' The bishop replied, 'Kneel down, and I will bless you. No further preparation is needed. Just trust in Providence!'"

This fundamentalism has reasserted itself in the church. For example, faced with declining congregational membership and chaos in the church, superiors attempt quick-fix responses and a dramatic sign that their congregations are still alive. They are prepared to send their religious with no adequate cultural formation into vastly complex cultures like those found in Asia. Theologically and humanly speaking this is unjust. Respect for people of different cultures, which will show itself in a willingness to learn about the local culture in the most professional manner possible, is the first requirement of dialogue.

Overview

The primary purpose of this book is to describe the multifaceted character of culture in this postmodern and globalizing world. Secondary aims are to explain the meaning of inculturation and why it is an imperative of the Gospel, to analyze the views of some theologians regarding inculturation, and to clarify why ecclesiastical authorities are reluctant to encourage it despite their supportive rhetoric.

Chapter 1 summarizes the changing meanings of culture over time by cultural anthropologists. As culture cannot be reduced any longer to one or two neat definitions, the titles of the next seven chapters will be different definitions of culture, to be followed by explanations and examples. These chapters will illustrate that cultures are complex realities and that glib analyses can be offensive, even unjust. Chapter 9 reviews the way culture is used in ecclesial documents and by some theologians. Chapter 10 highlights the various ways Jesus Christ approaches the cultures of his time. Chapter 11 explains the meaning of inculturation and particular obstacles to its implementation. Each chapter concludes with a short theological reflection.

The book is written for people with little or no knowledge of cultural anthropology and is thus designed for a wide range of readers, such as bishops, theologians, formators, seminary staffs, pastoral workers, college students, and others who are committed to understanding and dialoguing with contemporary cultures. Readers who wish to go more deeply into issues raised in the chapters will be helped by the many relevant references to contemporary authors in the social sciences. The book is also a reminder to psychologists that mental processes such as perception, memory, social interaction, and individual thinking are culturally

influenced. A culture structures life experiences into thinking processes, provides names for important feelings and significant environmental features, and permits communication with other persons of the same culture.

I have previously written about culture and inculturation in *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (Orbis Books, 1990), in *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Orbis Books, 1993), in *Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Liturgical Press, 2004), and in *Laughing with God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation* (Liturgical Press, 2008), but this book builds on anthropologists' dramatic rethinking of the nature of culture in significantly new ways.

Chapter 1

Cultures as Anthropologists See Them: An Overview

> Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language . . . mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several . . . disciplines, and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.
>
> —Raymond Williams, *Keywords*[1]

For centuries the concept of culture has remained the subject of vigorous controversy; in fact, anthropologists have never been able to agree on a single definition of culture. Back in 1952 researchers estimated that there were at least two hundred rival definitions of culture,[2] and over subsequent decades the number of definitions has increased by still more hundreds. Despite this confusion, definitions belong to one of three broad categories, namely, classicist, modern, and postmodern.[3] The purpose of this chapter is to explain the historical origin of, and differences between these categories. Particular emphasis will be given to clarifying the distinction between modern and postmodern definitions; this will require reviewing the historical development of cultural anthropology over the last hundred years. This introductory chapter will indicate something of the contentious nature and complexity of cultures; subsequent chapters will expand on the key themes that emerge.

1. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87.

2. See Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, "Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions," in *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology* 47 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952): 5.

3. See Anna Green, *Cultural History: Theory and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 1–10.

Classicist Definitions

A definition popular in the nineteenth century with anthropologists and still widely held by nonspecialists views a culture as a visible, comprehensible entity, the conscious creation of rational minds. It is the sum total of the spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic aspects of human society. The definition stresses the need to detail the observable phenomena: for example, foods, literature, dances. Cultures are then graded aesthetically, with European civilization as the normative culture at the top of the list. Non-European peoples are definitely inferior, but it is possible for them to acquire the normative civilization with its elite values and lifestyles as gifts from above.

The definition has many deficiencies in addition to its assumption of Eurocentric superiority. It overstresses historical lifestyles or customs of ethnic groups and downplays their struggles to adapt to the world in which they live. It freezes a culture in a time period and encourages romantic or fossilized views of a people's way of living in the past. A culture is likened to a machine—something with visible, rationally constructed and interconnecting parts; each part, such as a custom or institution, can be readily replaced by another component without people experiencing any sense of hurt or loss. The definition simply ignores how people feel about what they do.

Modern Definitions

Edward Tylor first used the term "culture" in 1871 to mean that "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[4] There are two key aspects to his definition. First, culture comprises those human attributes that are learned and learnable and are therefore passed on socially and mentally rather than biologically. Second, culture is in some sense a "complex whole"; unity and harmony are key assumptions. These insights profoundly influence the development of cultural anthropology for decades to come.

Constraining Quality

Cultural anthropology began to develop as a scholarly discipline in the early decades of the last century, particularly under the influence of

4. Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1871), 1.

several important figures such as Emile Durkheim (1885–1917), Max Weber (1864–1920), and later, more specifically, Franz Boas (1858–1942) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942). Durkheim believed that cultures are like the body of an animal. The purpose of each organ is to contribute to the unity and order of the whole body. So also in cultures: institutions or social structures exist to maintain order and the survival of cultures. Individuals are so constrained, even coerced, by these structures that their behavior has a certain social and cultural regularity. Weber did not emphasize this coercive role of culture, but rather focused on the role of ideas and individuals in evoking change. Anthropologists continue to struggle with this tension between the power of culture to restrain individual behavior and the role of the individual in resisting cultural constraints.

Under the strong influence of Malinowski and Boas in the years following World War I, anthropology emerged as a quite distinctive academic discipline. Boas's definition of culture shows the influence of Durkheim: "Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he [*sic*] lives, and the products of human activities as determined by these habits."[5] People are bound together by at least an unconscious feeling of unity; as emotions are the result of cultural influences, the emotional reactions of people will differ from culture to culture.[6] The power of culture to constrain and unify human activity is also evident in later definitions of culture by American anthropologists. For example, Clyde Kluckhohn and William Kelly: "A culture is an historically derived system of explicit and implicit designs for living, which tends to be *shared by all* or specially designated members of a group."[7] For the influential Talcott Parsons a culture is a unitary set of attributes that distinguish a social group. Roger Keesing could claim that cultures

5. Franz Boas, "Anthropology," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* vol. 2, ed. E. R. A. Seligman (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 79.

6. Encouraged by this notion, Margaret Mead (1901–1978) in her study of adolescent behavior in Samoa claims that gendered patterns of behavior are culturally, not biologically, determined (see her *Coming of Age in Samoa* [New York: William Morrow, 1928]). The objectivity of her research is now questioned. See Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

7. Clyde Kluckhohn and William H. Kelly, "The Concept of Culture," in *The Science of Man in the World Crisis,* ed. Ralph Linton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 98. Italics not in original.

"comprise systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in ways that humans live."[8]

Functionalism

The notion of the static, discrete, and homogeneous nature of cultures was further reinforced by Malinowski's principle of *functionalism*. He argued that culture "consists in . . . satisfying the innate biological desires of man [*sic*]."[9] Following Durkheim, he views all social actions and institutions as functional in the sense that they collectively fit together to maintain the unity of the whole. Malinowski believed the biological and psychological needs of individuals to be the fundamental force for social stability. Another influential functionalist, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), however, shifted the primary emphasis in defining culture from the satisfying of individual needs to the importance of maintaining social structures or institutions. Cultures are held together in a fixed manner by structures of juridical rules, status, and moral norms; actual people, their feelings and their relationships, ceased to be important to Radcliffe-Brown and his followers.

In brief, modern definitions of culture emphasize a type of "billiard ball" model of cultures as separate, impenetrable units, passing with little or no change from one generation to the next in a quasi-automatic way, self-integrating to maintain the status quo, resistant to external influences, homogeneous, and devoid of internal dissent.[10] Since this homogeneity is believed to define the unchanging, essential uniqueness of each culture in relation to other cultures, the modern approach to culture is especially favored by nationalists. Hence in threatening times nationalists emphasize the need to identify and maintain an all-embracing "Englishness," "Americanness," "Australianness," and so forth (see Figure 1.1).[11]

8. Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 68–69.

9. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Freedom and Civilization* (London: Unwin, 1947), 33.

10. See Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158–84; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–58.

11. See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 46–47.

Cultures: Typology		
Modern		**Postmodern**
Internal	homogeneous	fragmented
Borders	closed	porous
Identity	essentialist	multiple
Metaphor	order	chaos
Place	territorial	translocal
Dissenters	marginalized	integrated
Other cultures	inferior	interdependent
Power	hegemonic	contested

Figure 1.1

Postmodern Definitions

While postmodernity is a highly controversial term, nonetheless authors generally agree it has the following characteristics:[12] the rejection of rational criteria as the exclusive source of knowledge; the dismissal of overarching or universal myths or narratives and the acceptance of individual stories; the celebration of differences, spontaneity, superficiality, and humor; chaos, not order, at the center of cultures as people struggle for identities and power. The impact of postmodernity on cultural anthropology continues to be profound; reactions can be summarized under two broad headings: antifunctionalism and poststructuralism (Figure 1.2).

12. See James A. Beckford, *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change* (London: Sage, 1992), 19.

Postmodern Anthropology

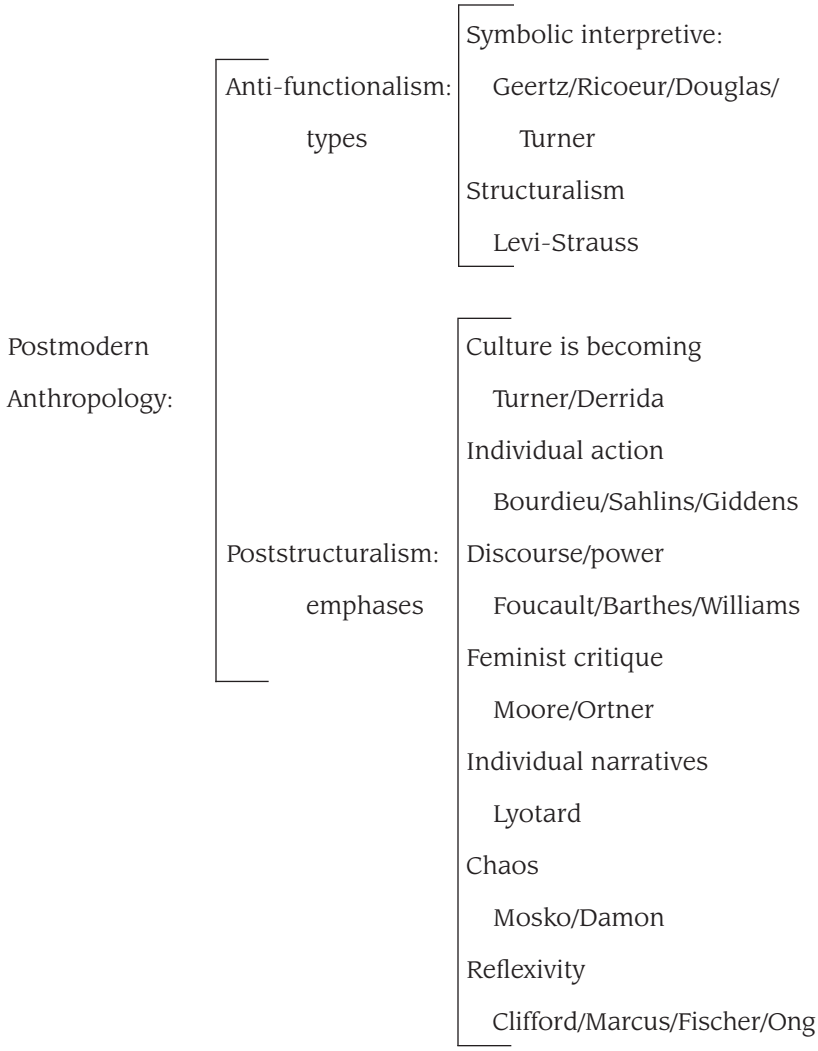

Figure 1.2

A. Anti-Functionalism

Symbolic Interpretative

The most influential anthropologist questioning the assumptions of modern anthropology is the American Clifford Geertz. Anthropology is not "an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."[13] Culture is a system of shared symbols and meanings; symbolic action needs to be interpreted, read, or deciphered in order to be understood. Contrary to functionalists, however, Geertz insists not just on the role of the anthropologist in interpreting symbols, but also on the importance of people themselves in deciphering their symbols. Real-life social action of individuals, including their feelings, must never be ignored in the study of cultures; that is, symbols cannot be studied in the abstract and without the collaboration of people—observers *and* actors—themselves. For Geertz, therefore, culture itself is a system of symbols, of which religion is a particularly important one. We are suspended in webs of significance we ourselves have spun, and culture is these webs. No longer can we say that people "have a culture," because we exist in the midst of, respond to, use, and create cultural symbols (see chap. 2).

In interpreting symbols Geertz insists on rigorous field work that must involve in his own terms "thick layers" of description of many kinds such as ethnographic details, different informants' interpretations, and the ethnographer's interpretations. Under the influence of Paul Ricoeur, Geertz sees that understanding another culture is like reading, and interpreting, a text. Ricoeur writes that culture can be interpreted as a text by applying the interpretive methods of hermeneutics. That is, a text is at the same time a collection of individual parts and a flawless whole; this means that those who interpret a text must be able to move easily as though on a continuum between these two points. The interpreter must seek access to the fleeting subjective intentions of those being observed, as we do with any written text.[14]

Victor Turner (1920–1983) and Mary Douglas (1921–2007) also follow the symbolic interpretive trend in anthropology and develop theories applicable to all kinds of cultures. While both owe much to Durkheim's

13. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 4–6.

14. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 73–101.

emphasis on the constraining nature of culture they, nonetheless, allow for the individual freedom of people in challenging the cultural status quo and effecting change. Douglas focuses on apparently ordinary things of life and finds extraordinary insights in them. She investigates rituals of purity and impurity, analyzes the importance of dirt and cleanliness in everyday life, shows that the selections people make about what they eat and the ways they prepare it mirror the way they organize their social life. Among Turner's lasting insights is a clear statement that culture is not a frozen entity, but a process whereby people are constantly interacting with one another, sometimes harmoniously and at other times in conflicting ways (see chaps. 3 and 6).

Structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) aimed to discover the underlying rules of language, those deep structures that must be present for language to achieve its purpose of communication. These structures are autonomous, that is, independent of the people using a language, something like a genetic program that predetermines human behavior. It is this dislodging of language from people that is one of the startling qualities of the movement that became known as *structuralism*. Claude Levi-Strauss (1908–2009), a French anthropologist, applies structuralist insights to anthropological studies. After examining the complex norms governing kinship relationships and the myths of peoples in traditional cultures, he highlights the importance of binary oppositions such as pure/polluted, order/chaos, parent/child in the way people think and act. Our minds are programmed to categorize things in binary ways and myths are able to reconcile these oppositions.[15]

The complex insights of Levi-Strauss have had a profound, but controversial, impact on anthropology as well as on other disciplines, including scriptural studies. On the positive side, he refocused academic attention on the power of myths and the emotions they evoke. Symbols are extremely complex realities and the understanding of their meanings demands significant expertise that not all analysts and social actors may possess. On the negative side, Levi-Strauss seems to deny the role of the acting subject; culture operates in a rather deterministic way to guide

15. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London: Cape, 1970); for an overview of his theories see Edmund R. Leach, *Levi-Strauss* (London: Fontana, 1970).

behavior. At one point he writes: "We claim . . . to show not how men [*sic*] think in myths, but rather how myths think themselves through men [*sic*], without their knowing."[16] As two critics comment: "The cultural system, it seems, dances to its own peculiar, mathematical logic."[17] Finally, lacking any analysis of power, he ignores the fact that people can manipulate mythologies to oppress others and enhance their own dominance. His thinking is almost a return to the orderly cultural assumptions of functionalism.

B. Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist anthropologists freely draw on multidisciplinary sources in their criticism of structuralism. They rebel against its oppressive determinism in which individuals are depicted as simple vehicles of deep predetermined structures, with no room for chance in human events. By contrast to this orderly view of cultures, poststructuralists offer a far more chaotic or disordered picture. The emphasis is on difference rather than likeness as the central quality; there are many gaps and paradoxes in the operation of systems that lack the predictability so enthusiastically proclaimed by structuralists. The philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) is reacting against structuralists when he insists on what he terms the "innocence of becoming"[18] that characterizes human behavior. This is in contrast to the structuralist view that actions are derived from some predetermined subterranean-like design. Under his influence and that of others the focus in the study of cultures shifted from linearity and causality to discontinuity. The future is never predictable, but is always open to chance. Derrida also deconstructs a text not to oppose or subvert it, but to uncover what it seeks to excuse and suppress, and to examine its conceptual and ideological schemata. Deconstruction is not a matter of opposing modern discourse, "but of unceasingly analyzing the whole conceptual machinery and its disinterestedness,"[19] that is, showing how it is used or manipulated for political power, for example the maintenance of patriarchal power, and

16. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Mythologiques* (Paris: Plon, 1964), 20.

17. Philip Smith and Alexander Riley, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 100.

18. Jacques Derrida, quoted in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism,* ed. Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2005), 291.

19. Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution called Literature: An Interview with Jacques," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 109.

for ideological purposes. The postmodern view of the self as a storyteller, based on the assumption that the self cannot get in touch with any deeper reality within, is challenged by the deconstructionists. They aim to peel back the layers of stories and expose reality; out of this process people will then be able freely to construct a reality-based sense of self.

Summary: Implications for Anthropology

- culture is not an entity, but a process of becoming;
- definitions of culture must be examined to uncover hidden assumptions of political, gender, or ideological power by authors;
- no observer is able to achieve a totally objective view of a culture;
- no one definition of culture can capture the complexity of a culture;
- globalization means that borders between cultures are softening;
- because people belong to particular cultures does not mean that they must act in predictable ways.

The following are key themes found emerging in poststructural anthropology, and they illustrate the inadequacy of the modern understanding of culture as a conceptual instrument in the study of individual cultures. Particular themes will be more fully treated in subsequent chapters.

"Acting Subject" Returns

"Practice theory" evolved in the late 1970s and early 1980s, deeply influencing the anthropological understanding of culture. Its major representatives are Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), Marshall Sahlins (1930–), and Anthony Giddens (1938–). Practice theory emphasizes individual action over the deterministic influences of culture so popular with structuralists. It reinstates the individual's ability to act freely without ignoring the larger structures in cultures that constrain social action. For example, Bourdieu's study highlights the relationship between collective norms, social power,

and individual action, as these are expressed through and by the human body. Instead of a structuralist binary distinction between consciousness and the unconscious, Bourdieu insists on a continuum between these two poles. Most human activity occurs in the space between these two poles that is termed "the domain of habit"; it is here that culture becomes encoded on the individual body. External social structures produce in individuals what he calls the "*habitus*," that is, a system of lasting dispositions and practices; *habitus* is culturally defined, but its location is the mind of the individual. He is rejecting any assumption that structures or cultures are static or rule-dominated, and therefore he strongly emphasizes the role of individuals in intuitively choosing what aspect of the *habitus* they wish to follow at a particular time (see chaps. 3 and 6).[20]

Centrality of Power

The term "discourse" is a central focus for many poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault (1926–1984), who continues to have significant influence on anthropological studies. For Foucault, discourse is the pattern of texts, the specialized languages and networks of power relations operating in and defining a particular field. For him power and knowledge are really the same thing and he is a master of revealing vested power interests (see chap. 3). For example, he examines the discourses of madness and sexuality, both of which he concludes are socially constructed. There is no such thing as madness or sexuality except ideas about them that are formed through discourse. The disciplines of medicine, psychiatry, biology, economics, and linguistics have through history inflexibly defined their "proper" subjects, dividing the world into ordered, controllable entities. Thus, once people are socially defined as mad, they must be controlled accordingly. People who control specialized disciplines hold extraordinary power in society, power that can rarely be challenged by outsiders. Power insidiously permeates every aspect of a culture and is psychologically invasive and oppressive. Both agents and subjects of power are rarely aware of this.[21] Functionalists among anthropologists, for example, are criticized for unknowingly misusing their power in

20. See Smith and Riley, *Cultural Theory*, 128–36, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

21. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

research to ignore the negative consequences of colonial domination and its support for traditional elites and oppression of women.[22]

Another French academic, Roland Barthes (1915–1980), focuses on the immense power of symbols and myths within popular culture to coerce people. He shows how racism, sexism, and colonialism loiter behind seemingly innocent advertisements. The power of myth is to be found, he argues, in its potential to make an arbitrary system of values appear as a system of facts. Use this or that soap and you will be "pure."[23]

Feminist Critique

Partly influenced by the writings of Derrida and Foucault, feminist anthropologists such as Henrietta Moore and Sherry Ortner began to concentrate on deconstructing evidence of male bias in the writings of anthropologists.[24] Women are too frequently portrayed as of little consequence in traditional societies; their often central role in social life has been neglected.

Negotiating Relationships

An academic discipline generally termed "cultural studies" is also affecting the way anthropologists view culture. Its multidisciplinary roots are to be found particularly in the works of the British academics Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart.[25] Culture is what people do to negotiate their relationship to natural, social, and economic realities in the midst of a rapidly changing, chaotic globalizing world. Theorists avoid the simplistic reductionist, determinist, doctrinaire, and antihumanist focus of classical Marxism by stressing instead the idea that culture is a product of shifting power struggles between different social groups based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and economic class divisions. Because these struggles evoke powerful emotions, Williams defines culture as "structure

22. Edward Said's highly controversial book, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), is an example. In his view anthropologists have either ignored colonialism's influence or have been only halfhearted in resisting it.

23. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (St Albans: Paladin, 1973).

24. See Henrietta L. Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

25. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Penguin, 1971).

of feeling."[26] Like Foucault, researchers in cultural studies are especially concerned about the relations between culture and power, particularly focusing on the ways in which various marginal and subcultural groups negotiate for political power. For example, ethnographers conclude that the fads and often outlandish fashions of some working class groups of youth, with their use of obscene and fetishistic symbols, are political protests against the ruling elites (see chap. 7).[27]

Multiplicity of Narratives

Jean-François Lyotard describes the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives."[28] A metanarative is an overarching story or theory that supposedly accounts for, explains, or interprets the truth of all other stories. Following Michel Foucault, Lyotard claims that scientists, philosophers, and other intellectuals just happen to be good storytellers, but there is no objective foundation to what they say. Foucault speaks of the "Other" to refer to those people who are excluded from positions of power by political or academic elites controlling the *metanarratives*. Excluded people have the right to tell their own stories or narratives to claim their identity. (See chaps. 2 and 6.)

This has significant consequences for cultures in a globalizing world. Nationalistic metanarratives insist that cultures must be related to a definite territorial place, so they speak of "the fatherland" or "the motherland." Cultures in this sense are "inward-looking" and discourage individual storytelling beyond national borders of place. But the postmodern emphasis on individual narratives involves an outward-looking or porous sense of place. People are freed to tell and listen to stories across the boundaries of place; the more they do this, the more interdependence grows. Cultures are then called "translocal."[29]

26. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 41.

27. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 18.

28. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

29. See Pieterse, *Globalization*, 78–79.

Embracing Chaos

For Peter Berger, culture protects people from the awesome insecurities and meaninglessness of chaos (*anomy*). Culture (*nomos*) is "an area of meaning carved out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, almost ominous jungle."[30] Disruptive experiences of chaos can be catalysts for radical cultural changes (see chap. 6). Anthropologists are now turning to the chaos theory of physics and applying its basic assumptions to the study of cultures. Broadly defined, the theory is "the science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being . . . [resulting in] a science of the global nature of systems."[31] It means that chaos and order interact and are always on the borders of the other. The movement of change is not smooth, but lurching, and its necessary impetus is stress. At certain points, changes may amplify into disturbances so profound and deep that a culture breaks apart, but it may eventually reconfigure itself into a much more complex system.[32]

Reflexivity

A new school of anthropology in the United States, "reflexive anthropology," developed in the 1980s and continues to have a deep impact on ethnographical studies. In their book *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*[33] George Marcus and James Fischer argue that anthropologists must now move their critical focus from the Third World to cultures of Western societies. They write: "The challenge of serious cultural criticism is to bring the insights gained on the periphery back to the center [i.e., the Eurocentric world] to raise havoc with our settled ways of thinking and conceptualization."[34] Another book, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*,[35] edited by James Clifford and George Marcus, especially caused controversy among anthropologists. As with any poetic

30. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 23.

31. James Glieck, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 5.

32. See Mark S. Mosko and Frederick H. Damon, eds., *On the Order of Chaos: Social Anthropology and the Science of Chaos* (New York: Berghahn, 2005).

33. See George E. Marcus and James Clifford, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

34. Ibid., 138.

35. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture*: *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

and narrative manuscript, the writings of Western anthropologists on Third World cultures cannot be considered objective and scientifically neutral; the hidden assumptions of superiority must be uncovered and critiqued. As described by these anthropologists, cultures were self-contained, with neat boundaries, internally consistent and unified entities of beliefs and values simply passed on from generation to generation. If hypothetically such self-contained cultures did exist in the past, they certainly are not to be found today in this globalizing world. Clifford in his critique compliments Walter Ong, SJ, (1912–2003) for pointing out significant weaknesses in anthropological texts written by Westerners. Ong rejected what he called "visualism," that is, the overconcentration in anthropological research on visual observation to the neglect of the feelings of touch, smell, and taste that are so important in non-literate cultures.[36]

In a later book, *The Predicament of Culture*,[37] Clifford forcefully reiterates the theme of *Writing Culture*. Anthropological writings are literary fictions of their authors, who are insensitive to the fact that their own biases determine how they see reality. Taken to its logical postmodern conclusion, therefore, this means that an anthropologist can never claim that he or she is speaking about reality as it is. The only reality ultimately is the text of the book as a literary device and it needs to be critiqued accordingly; ultimately the real object of anthropology must be the study by the anthropologist of himself or herself.[38] In short, reflexive anthropologists conclude "that the old anthropology had been rendered obsolete."[39] If anthropology is to survive, there has to be a methodological renewal that must take place within the context of "global movements of difference and power."[40]

Critiquing Poststructuralists

While many conclusions of postmodern anthropologists are timely, some insights from reflexive anthropology must be rejected. Ernest

36. See Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," *Writing Culture*, 11.

37. See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

38. See Robert Layton, *An Introduction to Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 197), 202.

39. Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologist's Account* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 209.

40. James Clifford, as cited by Kuper, *Culture*, 209.

Gellner, Professor of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University, argued that anthropologists who accept this conclusion become purely narcissistic as they "agonize so much about their inability to know themselves and the Other, at any level of regress, that they no longer need to trouble too much about the Other."[41] Marshall Sahlins correctly complains that some anthropologists have exaggerated the breakdown of boundaries and unities within cultures because in reaction to the disruptive forces of globalization "conscious and conspicuous boundary-making has been increasing."[42] People increasingly identify themselves as members of national, ethnic, or tribal groups. To hold back total disintegration, every culture must at a minimum maintain a level of unity by arousing a collective sense of transcendence and significance among its people (see chap. 5). It is interesting to note that by 2007 George Marcus, who earlier had rejected the possibility of saying anything universal about culture, writes that: "now is the time when there is once again a strong desire or appetite for macro narratives or explanatory frames in the human sciences."[43]

Working Definition

Some postmodern anthropologists are so dissatisfied with the modern understanding of culture that they desire to drop the word "culture" entirely in their research and writings. For them the word carries too much negative academic baggage. Today, however, most contemporary anthropologists accept the concept of culture, but with reservations. As Geertz writes: "Whatever the infirmities of the concept of 'culture' there is nothing for it but to persist in spite of them."[44] Even Clifford, a trenchant critic of the term culture, admits that though it is "a deeply compromised idea," he "cannot yet do without"[45] it. There is simply no other word to take its place. Sherry Ortner accepts this conclusion, but then suggests the way to proceed: "[The] issue is . . . one of reconfiguring

41. Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 45.

42. Marshall Sahlins, "Two or Three Things that I Know About Culture," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5 (1999): 414.

43. George Marcus, "The Passion of Anthropology," *Anthropological Yearbook of European Cultures* 16 (2007): 36.

44. Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 43.

45. Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 10.

this enormously productive concept for a changing world, a changing relationship between politics and academic life, and a changing landscape of theoretical possibilities." She concludes that "the fate of 'culture' will depend on its uses."[46]

I agree with this conclusion. The scope of anthropology is surely one of the most extensive among all academic disciplines—it potentially covers all the peoples of the world. Since no one definition of culture can possibly cover the realities of such a complex and changing globalizing environment, I will first present a general, working definition of culture. This definition emphasizes that cultures are not fixed entities, but processes in which people struggle for meaning in a threatening political environment. The definition also highlights the fact that a culture tells members of a particular society how to *view* the world, how to experience it *emotionally*, and how to relate to one another and to people of other societies. The titles of the next seven chapters, however, give more specific or focused definitions that will then be explained.

Culture: general definition

A culture is a pattern of meanings

- encased in a network of symbols, myths, narratives and rituals,
- created by individuals and subdivisions, as they struggle to respond to the competitive pressures of power and limited resources in a rapidly globalizing and fragmenting world,
- and instructing its adherents about what is considered to be the correct way to feel, think, and behave.

Theological Reflection

Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann sees that postmodern deconstructionism and reflexivity can be a liberating force in the use of Scripture. Under the influence of modernity, he argues, we made biblical texts

46. Sherry Ortner, "Introduction," in *The Fate of "Culture": Geertz and Beyond*, ed. Sherry Ortner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8, 11; see also Ortner's book *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–18, 107–28.

fit our orderly modes of knowledge and control. Deconstructionism allows the text to speak to us in all its prophetic radicality without our imposing meanings on it.[47] What examples can be given in which, under the influence of modernity, theologians have used biblical texts to fit their orderly modes of knowledge and control? Anthropological reflexivity calls theologians to be self-critical. They need to become aware of how much their own personal and cultural needs unconsciously mold their interpretation of theology and their desire to impose this uncritically as dogma on others.[48]

47. See Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

48. See Delwin Brown, "Refashioning Self and Other: Theology, Academy, and the New Ethnography," in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism,* eds. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41–55.

Chapter 2

Cultures as Webs of Symbols and Myths

> The result of symbolic activity . . . is the attainment of emotionally experienced meaning.
>
> —Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion*[1]

> Myths mean the value impregnated beliefs that men [sic] hold, that they live by or for. Every society is held together by a myth system.
>
> —Robert M. McIver, *The Web of Government*[2]

Symbols are as important to us as water is to fish. Without symbols we simply cannot converse with one another. In fact, we are in chaos! Symbols shape what we buy, the television programs we choose to enjoy, our responses to world events, our face-to-face communications, even our sense of identity. As Westerners we may like to think of ourselves as distinctly individualistic. We proudly choose the way we dress, even the cars we drive, in order to show our distinctive identity, but however outrageous our efforts, society does set symbolic limits to attempts to be unique. We are still expressing ourselves through symbols that are intelligible to society; otherwise we simply could not communicate.[3] The purpose of this chapter is to explain the nature and power of symbols, laying the foundation for an understanding of a particular type of symbol, namely myths or story symbols.

1. Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1971), 34.

2. Robert M. McIver, *The Web of Government* (London: Macmillan, 1947), 4.

3. See Joy Hendry, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds* (London: Palgrave, 2008), 93–109.

Symbols

Clifford Geertz emphasizes the fundamental role of symbols in his definition of culture. Culture is a "pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[4] A symbol is a "thing," for example, a place, an artifact, a material object our senses perceive; and it is able to convey a meaning, not just about itself but about all kinds of relationships. At the same time the meaning of a symbol is not a "thing," and it can only be understood inductively through the observation of many examples of its use by people.[5]

Because symbols are so much part of our lives it is difficult to analyze them and appreciate their enormous importance in our daily lives. To help readers reflect on their own experience of the power of symbols, I will narrate two personal events and then describe the nature, qualities, and types of symbols.

Discovering the Power of Symbols

Example 1

One day I was strolling down a road in the countryside outside Rome with a recently arrived friend from Australia. He was suffering from a severe attack of homesickness. Suddenly he gave a loud, joyful shout, rushed toward a tree, and physically embraced the trunk with his hands. This was most unlike him! What had happened to him? When I went up to him I immediately understood why he was acting in such a strange and embarrassing way. It was an Australian eucalyptus tree. My friend then remarked with obvious pleasure, "Now I am at home!"

Example 2

Recently I revisited my college in Cambridge University, Christ College, after many years away. I first stood right in front of the college gazing up at its coat of arms directly over the entrance. All kinds of energizing

4. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

5. See Mary LeCron Foster, "Symbolism: The Foundation of Culture," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* ed. Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 1994), 366.

memories of my happy student days quickly returned: challenging intellectual discussions with tutors, good times with friends, stories of academic heroes such as Charles Darwin and John Milton. On entering the first court I recalled that as students we were forbidden to walk on the lawn; that was possible only for senior academics. In the ancient dining hall I saw the coat of arms of St. John Fisher, cofounder of the College in the sixteenth century. I felt proud to have been at his college, but then sadness intruded as I recalled fellow students who had died over the years. As I walked back through the main entrance I somehow felt taller because from this institution I had received many academic skills that have stayed with me throughout my life. These skills seemed to take on renewed energy as I pondered the uncertainties of aging.

Reflecting On the Incidents

When a culture dramatically disintegrates, or threatens to, people experience, as Berger reminds us, the darkness of meaninglessness, a crushing taste of chaos. My friend had been thrown suddenly into a totally foreign culture.[6] He had tasted the shock of chaos. Then suddenly he saw a symbol of home and his joy returned. Such is the power of a symbol. In my incident I had been pondering the approaching chaos of old age, but on my visit to my college I relived what it symbolized for me from the past, namely, the gifts of learning and the skills to keep moving forward. Symbols are reservoirs of memory.

A sign or symbol such as a word, image, or action is something that points to something else. It expresses meaning. The words "sign" and "symbol" are frequently used interchangeably, but they differ quite significantly. A sign only points to an object—for example, the arrow indicating the site of the supermarket. A symbol, on the other hand, not only indicates something but represents it in some intrinsic manner.[7] Understanding a symbol necessitates being involved or becoming involved in it. The moment I saw the coat of arms of my Cambridge college the past again became present. To my friend the tree trunk had become Australia itself. A cross would be only a sign for an unbeliever, indicating just an event in the past, but to believers it is a symbol because the cross calls them to become involved in the many lessons it teaches. To see the cross

6. See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 23.

7. See Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus, 1964), 55.

as a symbol means, for example, that I might have to die to defend the faith, as Christ himself did.

Definition and Qualities

Definition

A symbol is any reality that by its very dynamism or power leads to (that is, makes one think about, imagine, get into contact with, or reach out to) another deeper (and often mysterious) reality through a sharing in the dynamism that the symbol itself offers (and not merely by verbal or additional explanations).[8]

There are three fundamental qualities to any symbol: the meaning, the emotive, and the directive. The meaning aspect is its cognitive quality; the symbol makes a statement about something that the mind is able to grasp. Second, a symbol has an emotive quality because it is able to touch the hearts and imaginations of people, evoking positive or negative feelings. The emotive quality of a symbol is thus able to *re*-present the object. At the sight of the coat of arms of my college I *re*-live the past, positive experience of student days. Third, a symbol has a directive quality. As a result of its cognitive and emotional impact I am directed to act in certain ways. The symbol of the tree moved my friend to run and hug it; the green lawn in my college was a symbol reminding me that students could not walk on it.

There are other qualities of symbols.[9] Symbols are said to be *multivocal*, that is, they gather many meanings over time. Take the coat of arms over my college gate and some of the meanings it evoked; many more could be added. Another quality is their *timelessness*. I had to think very hard to put dates to the events the symbol over the gate brought to mind. Because of their emotive quality, symbols have the ability to command the allegiance of people over a long period. Take the example of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Although it was delivered in 1863, it continues as a symbol of freedom to evoke powerful patriotic reactions among Americans. A symbol also has the quality of *polarity*; it

8. Definition by Adolfo Nicolas, SJ.

9. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, eds. Charles E. Reagon and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 36–58.

is able to evoke opposite meanings at the same time. The coat of arms in my college reminded me of many happy experiences, but it also brought to mind colleagues who had died over the last fifty years. Or take the example of the cross itself; it symbolizes simultaneously both the death and the resurrection of Christ. Sometimes symbols are described as models *of* and models *for*. The former describe clusters of symbols that convey the way things are; the latter indicate the ways people are expected to behave. Sometimes the same symbols have this twofold function. The men's suits on sale in the shop window symbolize what is stylistically acceptable today, but they are also endeavoring to convey a message to me personally that I must follow today's styles if I am to be socially acceptable.

Qualities of Symbols

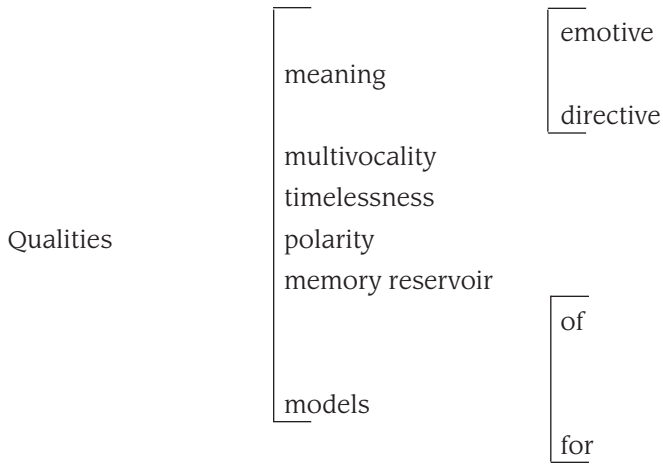

Figure 2.1

In summary, the effect of symbolic action is emotionally experienced meaning. Signs are concerned about visible and quantifiable experience, but symbols seek to draw us beyond the observable to a higher experiential, transcendent level of knowledge. Hence the role of evangelizers is not so much to turn objects into signs as to invite people to transform signs, such as the cross, into symbols.

Types

There many types of symbols, but it is useful here to describe some of particular importance.

Dominant and Instrumental

Dominant or key symbols are those that are clearly visible in a social situation and have meanings that are generally constant and consistent over time, such as a nation's flag. Instrumental symbols assist the dominant symbols to achieve their function. For example, a nation's flag may on important occasions be saluted with significant ritual dignity. This ritual is an instrumental symbol. A dominant symbol in my college is the coat of arms, and an instrumental symbol is the importance of its positioning over the entrance gate.

Summarizing and Elaborating

Dominant symbols can be arranged along a continuum between summarizing and elaborating symbols. Summarizing symbols compress meanings "in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way."[10] Again, the coat of arms is an example. It stands for the college, but at the same time for me it also evokes many meanings that relate to my time as a student. Another example is the American flag, which represents the American way of life. However, the American way of life is a multifaceted collection of actions, thoughts, and feelings that can include such things as democracy, individual rights, military superiority, or just simple things like apple pie. The aim of elaborating symbols, on the other hand, is "to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us to think about how it all hangs together."[11] Elaborating symbols are fundamentally analytic. They help us to arrange and mark intricate ideas and feelings into understandable and communicable language and action. They give us categories to think about the ways in which the world is ordered. For example, when St. Paul likens the church to a human body he is using an elaborating symbol.

10. Sherry Ortner, "On Key Symbols," *American Anthropologist* 75 (1973): 1339.
11. Ibid.

Condensed and Diffuse

There can be no debate about the meaning of a condensed symbol. For example, a traffic stop sign means only one thing—stop or else! But the meaning of a diffuse symbol largely depends on different contexts and even the personal interpretation of individuals. Before Vatican II the symbolism of the priest was of a condensed type: the priest was the intermediary with Christ at Mass and other sacraments between people and God. After Vatican II the symbolism became diffuse: the priest is now in "the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King."[12] He must build and animate a community of faith as well as presiding at liturgical rites.

Personal and Public

A symbol is personal when an individual is not under any public pressure to adopt it. For example, a person may freely choose to have a body tattoo in today's Western society. A symbol is public, however, when social norms insist it be adhered to; for example, in precolonial days in New Zealand certain tattoos for Maori men were compulsory.

Representational and Presentational

Representational symbols bind together things that are different even when there may not be any natural linkage between the symbol and the thing symbolized. The relationship results from custom. For example, the color green on traffic lights sends the message "proceed," but the color could easily have been blue. Presentational symbols, however, are more than representative in a purely cultural sense; rather, they "participate in, or are similar to, the thing they symbolize."[13] There must be a real analogy between the symbol and that which to which it directs our attention. The map on the wall in the entrance hall of my college resembles the actual geographical situation of the buildings.

Presentational symbols are particularly important in religious matters and actions. Thus water and blood in rituals contain qualities that are inherently associated with purifying and new life, or with death and

12. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum ordinis*), 1, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin P. Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello, 1975).

13. James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 70.

sacrifice. A presentational symbol in religion "points to and addresses a reality that is essentially transcendent, mysterious, and never fully plumbed."[14] It is only through symbols that we can meet ultimate reality in any meaningful manner. We say God is our Father, and this calls us to act as children of a loving Parent. The symbol of kingship biblically invites us to be loyal, obedient to, and respectful of God. When we speak of God one symbol can never be used to exclude others, because one symbol alone can never possibly portray the infinite presence of God. If, for example, we confine the symbol of God only to God's kingship, we are in danger of viewing God as a despot. Or if we exclusively say that God is just, we would exclude the overwhelming love and compassion God has for us in Christ. The exclusive use of one symbol fosters fundamentalism.

Body and Non-body Control

Cultures that significantly control people's freedom have very strict dress codes. For example, in the former Soviet Union spontaneous movements or unconventional dress for individuals were banned from all government rituals and public life in general. This is still the case in North Korea. By contrast, those symbols that express meticulous management of the human body and fixed coordination of many people were officially valued, for example the precisely coordinated mass military parades of May Day. In cultures where freedom is fostered, however, these symbols of rigid body control rarely exist. Hence in Western societies in general all kinds of spontaneous behavior such as hippie cults, communes, and sects are permissible.[15] To return to my college visit: as I looked around and noticed the dress of students, I became aware of how the culture of the college must have relaxed since my time. I knew this simply by observing that students no longer wear gowns to lectures, but one power symbol remains intact—students may still not walk on the lawns!

Polar Opposites

We commonly divide our lives into a number of separate or polar divisions, each marked by powerful, distinguishing symbols—for example work/leisure; home/workplace; white collar/blue collar; male/female;

14. Ibid.

15. For the development of this theme see Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 99–106.

kitchen/lounge room; public morality/private morality; church/state. That is, we tend to arrange our experiences according to a system of symbolic pairing. For example, we invite only very close friends into the kitchen and reserve the tidy living room for people we do not know well. Any infringement of these dichotomies can suggest disorder, danger, or pollution. It is not surprising, therefore, that unisex hairstyles and attire can still anger some people in Western cultures. The blurring of boundaries creates uncertainty, even the dreaded fear of chaos.

Interpreting Symbols

According to Dan Sperber symbols are uniquely noted for their mysterious quality of nonrationality. In his view symbolism arises from the human effort required to handle information of a kind that "defies direct conceptual treatment."[16] Neat, logical analysis of symbols is impossible. Geertz agrees. The analysis of culture is "not an experimental science in search of law but an *interpretive one in search of meaning*."[17] Semiotics is the art of putting ourselves in the shoes of others, our minds in their bodies. Geertz continues: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read . . . a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior."[18] Unlike a written text, a culture is also constantly changing. Just when we think we have interpreted the meanings within symbols, new meanings have developed, so our interpretation is already out of date.

As symbols are cultural constructs, it is rare that any symbol is able to have a universally recognized meaning. A ring, for example, may symbolically indicate steadfast dedication when placed on the finger of a bride in a Western marriage ceremony, but among the Bangwa of the Republic of Cameroon a ring on the ankle of a woman shows that she has been a slave. The eucharistic bread and wine, symbolizing the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, may be spiritual food for Catholics, but this is a source of scandal to Hindus who interpret it as having cannibalistic qualities. A symbol, therefore, can only be interpreted when viewed in relation to other symbols that form part of the

16. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 148.

17. Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation*, 5. Italics not in original.

18. Ibid.

same culture.[19] One rare example of a possibly universal symbol is the left hand connoting something fear-evoking, even at times evil.[20]

Pastoral Advice

- Symbols possess a density of meaning that words alone cannot encapsulate.

  Janine Roberts illustrates this by describing how residents of Dixie Valley, Nevada, reacted when they were forced by the military to leave their homes and land in order to make way for a target practice site. They held a symbolic burial of significant things in their lives that were now going to be lost: two articles of the Constitution, water from the artesian wells that kept the valley green, and a hip flask symbolic of the last drink one person would ever take in the Valley. It would be quite impossible to put into words alone the layer upon layer of meanings symbolized in these items.[21]
- Not all meanings of symbols are accessible, because they lie unarticulated, perhaps mostly unexamined in the innermost corners of people's minds; anthropologists variously call them "unconscious,"[22] "tacit,"[23] or "implicit."[24]
- The interpretations we give to symbols are "ours" because they may not fit the meanings intended by the people we are observing.

  When other people use words or act in certain ways that are familiar to us, we are tempted to assume that the meanings correspond to our own, but this may not be the case at all. Different people in the same culture are likely to differ when they try to

19. See Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 40.

20. See Robert Hertz, "The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study of Religious Polarity," in *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification,* ed. Rodney Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 3.

21. See Janine Roberts, "Setting the Frame: Definition, Functions, and Typology of Rituals," in *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy*, eds. Evan Imber-Black, Janine Roberts, and Richard A. Whiting (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 22–23.

22. See Rodney Needham, *Symbolic Classification* (Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear, 1979).

23. See Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*.

24. See Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

interpret their own public symbols. Any two Catholics may publicly state that they believe in God, and, because they use the same words it is assumed they "understand" each other. In practice their notions of what their belief in God means may radically diverge.

- There is a significant degree of subjectivity in our interpretations, implying the possibility of imprecision, of inexactitude, of ambiguity.[25]

  The problems of an "interpretation of others' interpretations"[26] are immense. Little wonder that Geertz bluntly writes: "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape."[27] If we want to understand the meanings of other people's symbols we must be prepared to spend significant time listening and questioning. Even then we may misinterpret their meanings.
- Symbols with their variety of meanings are born because they respond to the subjective needs of people and their experience of life. If theology and liturgies do not relate to these needs they remain irrelevant.

Myths: Story Symbols

> Whereas empirical language refers to objective facts, myth refers to the quintessence of human experience, the meaning and significance of human life.
>
> —Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth*[28]

Myths are story symbols and mythologies are many interconnected myths. When I stood in front of the episcopal coat of arms of St. John Fisher in the dining hall of Christ College, I recalled a story of my first formal meeting with the Master of the college in 1960. "Sir," he said, "I

25. See Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1985), 73.

26. Geertz, *Interpretation*, 18.

27. Ibid., 20.

28. Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (New York: Delta, 1991), 26.

want you to remember the great founders and alumni of the past. Think of John Fisher, cofounder and the one who brought Renaissance learning into this college and university, John Milton, Charles Darwin. These were men committed to excellence in learning. I expect the same of you!" It was a powerful, inspiring, but frightening memory. As I reflected on what the Master had said I became aware of how much this mythology had unconsciously influenced my life. This is the power of a myth and the ability of heroes or villains to make it visible in concrete ways.

Definition

- Myths are value-impregnated beliefs or stories that bind people together at the deepest level of their group life, and that they live by and for. Contrary to popular belief, myths are not fairytales or fallacies. A myth is a story or tradition that claims to reveal in an imaginative or symbolic way a fundamental truth about the world and human life. The truth is encased in a story simply because it is so powerful for those who accept it that it cannot be contained in any strictly technical or rational statement. In this sense myths are closer to poetry than to any other form of speech.
- Myths inspiringly and feelingly tell people who they are, what is good and bad, and how they are to organize themselves and maintain their feeling of unique identity in the world. Rollo May writes that "myths are like the beams in a house: not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it."[29] Or they resemble the information contained in the DNA of a cell, or the program technology of a computer. A myth is the cultural DNA, the software, the unconscious information, the program that governs the way we see reality and act accordingly.[30]

Myths and History

Myths can be a mixture of remembering, forgetting, interpreting, and inventing historical happenings. But the purposes of myth and history differ; myth is concerned not so much with a succession of events as

29. Ibid., 15.

30. See Sam Keen, "The Stories We Live By," *Psychology Today* (December 1988): 10.

with the moral significance of these happenings.[31] A myth is a "religious" commentary on the beliefs and values of a culture. Rollo May describes it this way: "The myth is a drama which begins as a historical event and takes on its special character as a way of orienting people to reality."[32] Thus George Washington can be viewed in historical or mythological terms. As seen from the historical perspective, he is depicted as fitting into a definite time period, influencing and being influenced by events around him. If, however, he is evaluated as a person who exemplifies the virtues of honesty, inventiveness in the face of difficulties, and hard work, then we are measuring him by the founding mythology of the nation. Ultimately, a story that becomes a myth can be true or false, historical or unhistorical, but what is important is not the story itself but the purpose it serves in the life of an individual, a group, or a whole society. Myths simply allow people of different societies and subcultures to understand themselves and their world.

Mythologies Compared: Australia and the United States

Australia's founding mythology, unlike that of the United States, is very much due to its partly convict origins and the harshness of most of its countryside. The internationally known lyric "Waltzing Matilda" recounts in a fictional way the very heart of this mythology. There are two central characters: a "swagman" (vagrant) and a "squatter" (rich land owner). The swagman is discovered by the squatter stealing a sheep and the squatter calls in the "troopers" (police), who rush to apprehend the thief. Then the swagman jumps into a "billabong" (small lake) and drowns, but the story does not end there. The swagman actually wins! His ghost lives on to haunt the rich and powerful, reminding them that the real hero in Australia is the underdog (or, as it is now symbolically termed in Australia, "the battler").

One of the positive contributions of Claude Levi-Strauss to our understanding of mythology is his emphasis on polarities and the ability of myths to reconcile them.[33] In the mythology of democracy there are two complementary poles: the rights of the individual

31. For fuller explanation of this section see Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 7–13.

32. May, *The Cry*, 26.

33. See Edmund Leach, *Levi-Strauss* (London: Fontana, 1970), 54–82.

and the common good. The third quality, "fraternity," is the balance between these two mythological poles. For Americans fraternity means that the rights of the individual are to be respected even though the common good may suffer. In Australia it is the common good that must be emphasized even though individual rights are consequently restricted; this egalitarian interpretation is commonly summed up in the expression "Fair go, mate." The "mate" refers especially to those on the margins of society and the economy, society's underdogs. Consequently significant cynicism is directed toward people who show "squatter-like" qualities, that is, who dare to "put on airs" of superiority or artificiality. Any politician who forgets that the swagman remains the mythological hero to this day has no political future.[34]

By contrast, in the United States, since the rights of the individual take precedence, the individual retains, for example, the unqualified right to own guns despite the clear, tragic consequences to the community. It is a world made for capitalism and its expression—unrestrained competition, not collaboration for the common good. Not surprisingly, therefore, interest groups such as the medical profession, through their professional associations and major corporations, have been able to wield considerable unrestrained economic and political power. Marginalized people must solve their own problems. Any attempt by governments to redress the imbalance in favor of the common good is met with strong emotional opposition. Efforts at healthcare reforms have been branded as "socialized medicine," "government meddling," enough to condemn the most justice-based plans! It will be interesting to see how successful President Obama can be in his attempts to reform the health system. In Australia, however, with its emphasis on egalitarianism, not only is there universal healthcare but governments are expected to respond to the needs of people on the margins of society.[35]

34. See Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People: Myths of State* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988),121–208; Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli* (Sydney: Macmillan, 2001), 122–24.

35. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Healthcare Ministry: Refounding the Mission in Tumultuous Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 65–76.

Qualities

Myths respond positively to five basic, interrelated needs. They tell us that we have a reason to exist, define for us a way of living that makes sense and is safe, provide a social and legal framework that allows us to live together in an orderly way, inculcate an inspiring sense of belonging and pride in our way of life, and are able to reconcile contradictory forces. There are, however, possible negative qualities of myths that are now to be described.

Exclusivity

People of the same culture commonly and unconsciously believe that their myths alone have validity; this can blind people to reality and foster prejudice and discrimination. The founding fathers of America had a very exclusive mythology of equality that did not extend past Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Many Americans might think that the potlatch feast in which Native American tribes in the Northwest of their country methodically destroy their wealth is senseless waste. They fail to see that they are doing the same thing every time they roam through shopping malls spending money on expensive and unnecessary extravagances.[36]

Conservatism

Myths give a sense of security and identity, but this can lead to an excessive conservatism when times demand radical changes. As Sam Keen comments, a myth "encourages us to . . . imitate the way of the culture's heroes, to repeat the formulas and rituals exactly as they were done in the old days." That is fine until radical change becomes necessary for survival, and then it is of little use "to walk into the future looking through a rear-view mirror."[37]

Manipulative Potential

To prevent the devastating effects of national chaos, every culture must maintain some level of order by encouraging a shared sense of transcendence and significance among its citizens, that is, a national mythology. This, however, can open the doors for political manipulation

36. For French examples see Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 103–7.

37. Keen, "The Stories," 11.

of power by leaders. Hitler's powerful subordinate, Heinrich Himmler, was able to develop a highly effective national myth of superiority based on a toxic mix of racial theory, primitive Teutonic pagan religion, and mass rituals.[38] Less serious was Fidel Castro's manipulation of Cuban mythology. Seeking to remove Cuban cultural dependence on Western art styles, Castro insisted that the rhumba should be promoted as the dance most characteristic of Cuban identity. This was a statement to the world that the revolution would correct the abuses of the past and that Cuban culture would embrace the sensual African legacy that had been previously suppressed.[39] Even in democracies, however, politicians and others can attempt to manipulate national mythology in their favor.

Drift Capacity

Drift takes place when myths change, degenerate, or disappear without any deliberate planning or even awareness by people that it is happening. It is sometimes said that the church, by its founding mythology, is not a democracy—it has never been and will never be one, and so Rome can justifiably ignore the values of participative or consultative leadership. This represents a myth drift. Not only is it contrary to the spirit of Vatican II, but it also goes against the original mythology of the church for a significant period of history. Historian Leonard Swidler concludes that the choice of bishops by clergy and people remained effective until the twelfth century. John Carroll, the first bishop of the United States, was chosen with Rome's approval by the priests of the country. As late as the beginning of the twentieth century fewer than half of the world's bishops were directly chosen by the pope.[40]

Residual Challenge

A *residual* myth is one with little or no daily impact on a group's life, but that at times can surface to become a powerful operative myth. Slobodan Milosevic, the Serb leader, manipulated Serbian public opinion in his incendiary speech of 28 June 1989 by invoking a residual myth of

38. See Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 317–27.

39. See Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity*, 92–97.

40. See Leonard Swidler, "Democracy, Dissent, and Dialogue," in *The Church in Anguish,* eds. Hans Kung and Leonard Swidler (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 310.

humiliation when he recalled the defeat of Serbs by Muslims in 1389. The people responded with enthusiastic support. A more contemporary example is the global economic crisis. The public myth of capitalism is that unfettered market forces of supply and demand must regulate the world's economies. The residual myth based on bitter historical experience, however, is that this public myth leads to disastrous consequences; there must be governmental regulation to control unrestrained greed. This residual myth resurfaces in times of economic depression, as in the contemporary world financial crisis, but eventually the public myth may again prevail as the economic situation improves.

Polar Tensions

As myths are symbols, they contain within themselves polar opposite meanings. In the myth of democracy there are the polarities of the rights of the individual and the common good, but myths never tell us precisely how these polarities are to be reconciled in practice. In Vatican II the myth of the priesthood contains two polarities—the sacramental priesthood and the priesthood of all believers. Nowhere in the documents does the council spell out precisely *how* these polar opposites are to be balanced in real life; in fact, it simply could not do so. Where one pole is emphasized to the exclusion or neglect of the other, we have the seeds for conflict and fundamentalism.[41]

Theological Reflection

For communication to occur in theology and liturgy, the structure of the symbols must first be able to express something relevant to the culture of the people; otherwise what is said is meaningless. For example, many of the traditional Western symbols of Jesus, such as King or Judge, make no sense in the Asian context. Hence the Synod of Bishops of Asia recommended in 1998 that symbols such as the following be adopted: the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Obedient One.[42] In Australia the key Christian festivals, devised with Europe of the northern hemisphere in mind, have no clear connection with the nation's life and

41. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 39–43.

42. See Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 128–46.

rhythms.[43] Second, people must themselves be involved whenever their religious myths and symbols require changing. I am grateful for Vatican II, but as an anthropologist I believe it was culturally naïve. Interfering with a symbol and myth without involving the people concerned leads inevitably to unnecessary messiness, pain, and grief or chaos. This lesson has yet to be significantly acknowledged and accepted in today's church.[44]

43. See Gerard Moore, "Sacramentality: An Australian Perspective," in *Christian Worship in Australia: Inculturating the Liturgical Tradition*, eds. Stephen Burns and Anita Monro, 137–51 (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 2009).

44. See Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 42.

Chapter 3

Cultures as "Not Dirt," "Pure," and Power Reservoirs

> Dirt [is] matter out of place. . . . Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter.
>
> —Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*[1]

Just before beginning this chapter I looked around my study, and what a mess I saw! Books and papers in disarray. "Ugh, something must be done about this before I can start to write." Once I had put things into their right places my peace of mind was restored and I could begin writing in earnest. The aim of this chapter is to explain how an apparently unimportant incident like this can have profound implications for our understanding of the nature and power of culture.

The fact is that a simple incident or object may point to what is at the heart of an entire culture. For Karl Marx it is the commodity that contains the secret of the entire capitalist system of production. Once we understand the ways in which goods are produced and exchanged, says Marx, we will discover the core of capitalism. For Durkheim an understanding of the simple totems of Indigenous Australians could lead to foundational insights into the elementary forms of all religions. For the philosopher-historian and sociologist Michel Foucault it is the often hidden, widespread violence of power. For anthropologist Douglas, however, the object of concern is everyday dirt. It evokes an attitude—"ugh!"—and demands a solution: "clean up!" What is considered dirty in some way or other

1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 48.

pollutes or defiles what is clean, and it must be removed. An appreciation of what causes things to be called dirty or clean, Douglas argues, may uncover the deepest mysteries of the moral order itself, the reasons why some societies renew and reaffirm their fundamental collective feelings and beliefs while others do not even bother.[2] This chapter focuses on the insights into culture of Foucault and Douglas.

Power: Michel Foucault

Power in cultures, traditionally defined as the capacity to influence, takes many forms. *Position* power is the ability to use power flowing from the status of the person in an organization; *coercive* power is the ability to force people to act through fear of punishment; *reward* encourages a response by offering or refusing benefits; *personal* power is the capacity to influence because of personal qualities. In addition there are *unilateral* and *reciprocal* power. A person exercising unilateral power refuses to receive influence from others, so that dialogue is impossible. Reciprocal power, however, allows a person not only to influence others but also to be influenced by others; this form of power is integral to all genuine dialogue.

Disciplinary Power

While acknowledging these types of power, Foucault introduces an entirely new way of viewing power in contemporary cultures. He refers to "power/knowledge" to indicate that every search for knowledge is in fact a quest for power. Contrary to Enlightenment thinking, which assumed that knowledge leads to freedom, he asserts that knowledge results in domination.[3] As background to his postmodern views on the nature of power we need to recall that he distinguishes two overall historical developments in Western social and political life: the increase in political and state power and the emergence of new techniques by which power is directed at individuals at all levels of society. It is this second development that especially concerns him. Though he never explicitly refers to culture in his writings, he in fact deals with topics that are at the heart of every culture, namely power and "discourse."

2. See Robert Wuthnow, James D. Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, *Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 85.

3. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

For Foucault, power that is ubiquitous and insidious is predominantly *disciplinary*, but to understand this we need to first appreciate what he means by "discourses" and the central role of the human body in their development. For him a discourse is the organization of ideas and language that uniquely characterizes every institution.[4] It is a collection of specialized knowledge through which the controlling elite is able to discipline others. Power and knowledge in discourses "directly imply one another . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of the field of knowledge." He continues: "the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power/knowledge and their historical transformations."[5] Since the eighteenth century the physical human body, he claims, has become the primary location of disciplinary political and ideological power, surveillance, and regulation. With the body and its actions in mind, the structures of the state, health departments, educational systems, psychiatry, the law, and so forth classify the limits of behavior and document activities, disciplining the bodies that violate the established boundaries in order to make them politically and economically valuable.

Example: The Medical Profession

Foucault illustrates his theory with particular reference to the historical development of the discourse of the medical profession, which is able to categorize bodies as deviant or normal, as hygienic or unhygienic, as controlled or requiring control. He writes: "[Medicine] set itself up as the supreme authority in matters of hygienic necessity . . . [It] promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations." He goes further: "In the name of biological and historical urgency, it justified the racisms of the state . . . it grounded them in 'truth.'"[6] In his book *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975) he further develops his analysis of the relationship between disciplinary power and surveillance. He refers to the "anatomical atlas" that is the human body formed by the medico-scientific gaze. Since medical practices altered in the late eighteenth century, the adoption of such procedures as the physical examination,

4. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 27.

5. Ibid., 27–28.

6. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1979), 54.

the postmortem, the use of the stethoscope, psychiatry, radiology, surgery, the establishment of hospitals and doctors' clinics have all resulted in an ever-increasing power over the body. A person is expected to surrender his or her authority over his or her body to the medical profession, the supreme example of surveillance.

The surveillance power of medical knowledge, Foucault claims, is only a symptom of wider trends in the Western world. This power of surveillance and control especially resides in self-perpetuating cultural systems, and individuals become their watching agents. It is this power that is intensifying in all areas of life through an ever-increasing array of laws, rules, and rituals. We are ceaselessly under scrutiny by all kinds of people such as doctors, police, security guards, bureaucrats, and in recent years through the dramatic increase in closed circuit security television. In shops, workplaces, on highways, and in all kinds of public areas, surveillance can now occur throughout the entire day and year. Even if there is no surveillance, people still think someone is watching. Within the Catholic Church itself theologians and pastors experience this ever-present power of surveillance. For example, restorationists or fundamentalist Catholics are able to send an article or a sermon to a bishop or to Rome for evaluation with computerized speed, the target of their concern remaining unaware of the identity of the accusers.

Though Foucault's writings are often annoyingly obscure, his use of "discourse" helps us to consider power and culture without the academic baggage that has come to be associated with terms like "ideology." For example, "ideology" is apt to conjure up controversial Marxian terminologies such as class, modes of production, historical materialism, economic determinism. Marxists have traditionally claimed that their theories alone give the complete, unbiased truth about the social world, but Foucault's emphasis on discourses and their origins undermines such self-assurance. He questions the ability of any form of human knowledge to reach a complete and unbiased understanding of the ways people behave. We must be suspicious of people who are not prepared to have their assumptions of truth questioned.

Defining "Dirt": Mary Douglas

The question is: why are some things judged to be dirty and other things clean? Why are shoes considered dirty when deposited on the table, but clean when on the floor? It is the location that defines their dirtiness and its power to evoke a reaction. As Douglas writes: "Dirt is

the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[7] This means that what is thought to be dirty is relative. Douglas comments: "It's a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table . . . it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom . . . out-of-door things downstairs . . . . In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea to confuse or contradict cherished classifications."[8] It is not just a question of factual location that condemns something as dirty or qualifies it as clean. Shoes are not dirty just because they are on the table rather than on the floor, but because they *should* be on the floor and *not* on the table. There is a moral quality to reality that renders the issue of classification, and misclassification, also a matter of right and wrong. When we say that shoes should not be on the floor we are not only stating a fact about "the mechanical appropriateness of nature, but a moral evaluation of that order."[9] Dread of pollution is like fear of immorality or sin.

Classification and Impurity

Beliefs and reactions to dirt or pollution are not haphazard, but are in fact systematic and can be understood only within the framework of wider mythological categorizations. That is, food taboos are rarely isolated beliefs; they point to an underlying social structure into which they are inserted: "Defilement is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas . . . the only way in which pollution ideas make sense in reference to a total structure of thought whose key-stone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation."[10] Any object or action that confuses or contradicts the classifications within a culture of what is clean is considered polluting and dangerous in social relations. Douglas illustrates her thesis by examining the foundation of Jewish dietary rules in the Old Testament decreeing certain animals either clean or unclean. The rules were constructed on a model of God as One, Complete, and Whole: "To be holy is to be whole, to be one: holiness is unity, integrity,

7. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 48; for a revised analysis of Douglas's culture models see her book *Cultural Bias,* Occasional Paper 35 (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1978).

8. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

9. See Wuthnow, et al., *Cultural Analysis*, 87.

10. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41.

perfection of the individual and of the kind."[11] The animals that were considered unclean did not fit neat categorizations. Lacking completeness, they were "imperfect members of their class"[12] and could not be eaten. They included those that lived in the water but did not have fins and scales (eels, shellfish), birds of the air that at the same time lived in the water (gulls, pelicans). The pig was also unclean, for although it came within the category of cloven-hoofed animals, it did not chew grass like the edible goat and sheep. The likewise cloven-hoofed antelope, goat, and sheep were clean because they did eat grass.[13]

Some peoples at times, however, embrace oddities or anomalies rather than avoiding them. The Lele men of Zaire argue that if they always avoided what is anomalous they would never bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality in their society.[14] So by ritually eating an anteater, definitely classed as an anomaly, the men claim that they are temporarily breaking down the barriers between what is pure and impure in their lives and culture.[15]

Culture: Models[16]

On the basis of her conclusion that defilement is never an isolated happening, but is related to a particular cultural context, Douglas develops a fourfold set of culture models based on two variables, namely *group* and *grid*.[17] *Group* denotes the strength of the boundary surrounding a social group, while *grid* is concerned with the degree of rules, hierarchy, and social differentiation within it. Those cultures that are weak on both variables tend to be individualistic, whereas those cultures, for example some sects, that have strong group but weak grid have a robust feeling of collective identity and are egalitarian. Cultures of strong group

11. Ibid., 64.

12. Ibid., 55.

13. For a later development of these insights see Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and her "Justice and the Cornerstone: An Interpretation of Leviticus 18–20," *Interpretation* 53 (October 1999): 341–50.

14. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 170.

15. See ibid., 171; also Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas* (London: Routledge, 1999), 96–99.

16. These models are an updating of those originally published in my book *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 81–97.

17. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 114–28.

and strong grid, such as the army and police, are noted for their formal rules and power, with little tolerance for disobedience. We now examine these four models in more detail.[18]

Strong Group/Strong Grid Cultures

In the strong group/strong grid cultures the boundaries of the group and the way individuals are expected to relate to one another within the boundaries are sharply defined. The modern definition of culture fits this model very well indeed, for the culture it depicts is internally and externally neatly unified and integrated. People are expected to fit into a tradition-based, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and patriarchal system that is presumed to have by right the monopoly over power and knowledge; dependency and conformity are the esteemed qualities. Within the hierarchical system, which is visibly reinforced by symbols of coercive power such as titles and attire, there will be obvious socially graded divisions such as classes and castes with specialized roles and inequitable access to economic and educational resources. To maintain conformity there are detailed, rigid, morally sanctioned rules, and to break them is to risk ritual pollution. The patriarchal hierarchical leaders' task is coercively to maintain the status quo. People feel under constant surveillance, fearing their misbehavior will be reported and punished; they are encouraged to bully those who dare to question and defile the status quo.[19]

If there is a religious mythology there will be a hierarchy of transcendent gods/spirits intimately concerned with the well-being of the culture and its stability. There are intermediary and more approachable spirits helping people to relate to the higher and more remote gods/spirits. The world is maintained in harmony by the gods/spirits who keep the evil forces under control, but people can allow those same powers to enter their lives through sin. Sin is the unconscious or conscious breaking of detailed rules established particularly to maintain the clarity of roles and boundaries within the culture. Sexual sins can be especially evil because if control over the body is broken there is real danger that the social body will be fractured also. There are rituals under the firm direction of officials to remove the pollution resulting from sin and to ward off evil forces endangering the predictability of daily life. Examples of cultures

18. For further explanation see Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 27–28.

19. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Confronting the Demon: A Gospel Response to Adult Bullying* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 65–94.

approximating to this model are the Israelites as described in the book of Leviticus, the Soviet Union, the Indian caste system, the pre–Vatican II church, prisons, armed forces, and hospitals.

Strong Group/Weak Grid Cultures

In cultures of this kind people have a sense of belonging to *this* group rather than to another; there is, however, a lack of clarity about *how* individuals are to relate to one another. There is an ideology of egalitarianism, but as the grid is weak there is considerable inner confusion over roles and access to scarce resources within the group. Officials may try coercively to reimpose an internal sense of order, but with little success. People will form together in loose, social, quasi-egalitarian units to compete more effectively for limited resources, but they are forever intensely suspicious of one another, fearing all the time that people will take advantage of them. They blame others for their problems. Suspicions eventually lead to feuding—that is, relations of mutual animosity among intimate groups in which resort to verbal or physical violence is anticipated on both sides.

Mythologically this world has no harmony. It is subject to all kinds of warring forces such as ghosts, evil spirits, and witches; it is a volatile world out of control in which evil forces and spirits aim to crush people indiscriminately. Sin is an evil affecting one's inner self far more than is the case in the previous model, which stressed an external state of pollution as a result of sin. Rituals are of two major types. There are public, coercive rituals of witch-hunting and political show trials against those branded for endangering group identity. The second category of rituals includes those at the grassroots conducted by unofficial sect or cult leaders in response to the people's need for meaning in the midst of fickle and evil forces that forever threaten them. These unofficial ritual leaders need to find the right formula, otherwise their intercessory prayers will be ineffective and they will lose their guru power.

Leland White argues that the evangelist Matthew's community illustrates some characteristics of this type; the members feel they belong to a community of the righteous marked off from the unrighteous. The egalitarian low grid qualities are evident in the dearth of formal power structures and the barring of rank or achievement status within the community.[20] The model can also help to explain traditional church life

20. See Leland White, "Grid and Group in Matthew's Community: The Righteousness/Honor Code in the Sermon on the Mount," *Semeia* 35 (1986): 61–89.

in the Philippines, Mexico, and South America. Popular religiosity provides the grid for millions of poor, with its saints and fiestas being a source of identity/security within a world subject to evil and unpredictable forces. Other examples could include the emergence of global Pentecostalism and the rise of religious and political fundamentalism, including restorationism in mainline Christian churches (see chap. 8).

Weak Group/Strong Grid Cultures

In these cultures people are sturdily egalitarian-oriented, individualistic, utilitarian, and competitive, but they have a very weak sense of belonging or of having obligations to the group. People obtain their sense of personal identity from submitting to and interiorizing the clearly stated norms and goals of their society's inner structure. Individuals form alliances with one another to provide better opportunities for competitive successes, but such alliances are very fragile since they are held together only for the self-interest of the individuals themselves.

Sin is just negligence or the making of mistakes through one's own fault in the personal mission to succeed or achieve one's destiny. It is the failure to take advantage of this or that relationship that will guarantee for individuals an economic, social, or political advantage. Power rests with successful business-organizational cultures, especially global, whose CEOs symbolize the secrets of achievement. More and more improved surveillance techniques ensure that workers are forever success-oriented. Morality in this type might be termed "Watergate," that is, "do everything to get ahead, without any concern for the common good, provided one is not found out." Among the high priests in this culture type are management and mass media consultants. Individualism and self-fulfillment are so encouraged, no matter what the costs to the group, that people will turn to any fad/magic such as astrology that offers them the secret of instant success.

Religion in this model will reflect the basic stress on the grid over the group. Since cosmic forces in whatever form do not intrude into people's lives, secularization flourishes; if god(s) or spirits do exist, they are befriended for the benefit of individuals in pursuit of material success. The society has the potential for religious—even business-oriented—millenarian movements, that is, enthusiastic crazes under the direction of charismatic leaders using their personal power to offer quick and "miraculous" shortcuts to the desired goals of the individual. These movements are generally short-term, but when they are at their peak

their leaders (for example the radio orator and anti-Roosevelt/New Deal Fr. Charles E. Coughlin of the 1930s)[21] can rival or threaten the authority and power of the officially appointed leaders. Traditional religious rituals are critically assessed according to the utility principle: will they advance my position in society? If they feel right and useful, then let's accept them and see what happens. If success does not come, then turn elsewhere; God and spirits are therefore seen as "enablers in my journey toward success."

Example

Robert Bellah and others in their book *Habits of the Heart* seek to analyze the values of middle-class Americans.[22] One fundamental emphasis emerging in their research is a common acceptance of Lockean-inspired utilitarian individualism and a lack of consensus over values that bind people together for the sake of the group. This consensus deficiency is an extremely weak foundation on which to build a community in which individual rights are balanced by the legitimate requirements of the common good. Their description of American society conforms well to the weak group/strong grid cultural model—for example: vigorous individualism, a philosophy of self-fulfillment, a manipulative use of individuals or organizations to achieve fulfillment, and secularization.

Weak Group/Weak Grid Cultures

A culture that resembles this model is strongly egalitarian in social relationships and in gender, with minimum coercive power pressure from structures within and at the boundaries of the group. Generally communities of this type emerge only under the inspiration of some charismatic leader who denounces the oppressive rigidity of the group/grid traditions or structures of a dominant culture from which escape is sought. Dress codes and rigid rules of conduct based on tradition are considered irrelevant. Far more important is the inner conversion and effective commitment of members to the group's vision/values, resulting

21. See Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 90.

22. See Robert Bellah and others, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 111–24.

in what sociologically are termed intentional communities. There is government by direct democracy or consensus; the group is open to new insights, dialogue, and outsiders. Power is essentially reciprocal.

Personal identity according to this model comes from an awareness of one's self-worth and potential for change, not from a culture's traditional internal and boundary structures. Religion is highly personalized. A personal relationship to gods/spirits and to other people who have the same values as oneself is what counts and thus traditional rituals are unimportant unless they reinforce that sense of relationship or emerge out of the events of daily living, in which case they are very simple in structure. The world of nature and human relationships is inherently good, and if there are problems such as the abuse of the environment they are due to traditional group/grid structures.

Historical examples of this model are: the early Christian community in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:12); prophetic groups like religious congregations in the first stage of founding enthusiasm, for example, St. Francis of Assisi and his early followers and L'Arche communities; countercultural communities or communes through history, such as the commune movement in the late 1960s and the environmental groups of recent times; and religious communities at the authentic refounding stage. If fervor is to be maintained, members must face the challenge of building suitable structures and group identity that do not crush the original enthusiasm.

Theological Reflection

Only those people who assume that the church is a pure spirit can conclude that it does not exist in cultural forms. Theologian Henri de Lubac is right: "Like all human institutions, the Church has her exterior façade, her temporal aspect, often ponderous enough . . . . There is certainly nothing 'nebulous and disembodied' about her—far from it."[23] Given, therefore, that the church has a history and cultural expressions of its own building, the question is: of the above culture models, which one do the gospels call us to approximate to in order to find a new style for presence in a postmodern world?

A culture built on religious, social, and political prestige may have been acceptable in a previous age, and there were plenty of theologians

23. Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 114.

who even used Scripture to support that concept. But no longer. People are looking for Gospel witnesses who primarily use reciprocal power in their ministry.[24] One role of theologians is to be prophetic, that is, to ponder what is happening today in light of the gospel narratives and to reflect back to believers what they see. When some followers of Jesus pondered what he had said and done, they decided to follow him no longer: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" (John 6:60). Truly prophetic theologians may experience the same isolating reaction, but Jesus will still be near and walking with them (Luke 24:15); they "will know the truth, and the truth will make [them] free" (John 8:32).

24. See the reflections by Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964), 135–57.

Chapter 4

Cultures as Stigmatizing Patterns of Social Exclusion

> The option for the poor is not just a matter of *giving* to them, but of *receiving* from them.
>
> —Jon Sobrino, *The Eye of the Needle*[1]

> Discussions of welfare reform . . . too often fail to address a broader problem: a problem in the way that people who are not poor think about those who are.
>
> —Mark Peel, *The Lowest Rung*[2]

Annually an estimated ten million people die of hunger and hunger-related diseases. Over one billion people must struggle to survive on less than one dollar a day and almost half of the world's children live in poverty. This clearly becomes a powerful breeding ground for armed conflict and terrorism. It is embedded in cultures in which inequalities of class structures, gender, age, and ethnicity foster new and complex types of poverty.[3] Yet these statistics of global poverty can only hint at the extent of the human suffering. Even in affluent countries like the United States there are significant levels of poverty that remain stubbornly persistent. Despite its widespread reality there is little agreement

1. Jon Sobrino, *The Eye of the Needle: No Salvation outside the Poor* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2008), 49. Italics in original.

2. Mark Peel, *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

3. See Tim Butler and Paul Watt, *Understanding Social Inequality* (London: Sage, 2007), 116–34.

about how to define, measure, and analyze the connection between cultures and poverty.[4] The purpose of this chapter is to concentrate particularly on the relationship between poverty and cultures. Is it correct to speak of cultures of poverty?

Cultures of Poverty

Debate

It is generally agreed that any definition of poverty must take into account the social, cultural, and historical circumstances of people because any attempt to measure it only in terms of the lack of access to adequate income is too narrow an approach. Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist, recognized this in the 1960s and argued that there is an identifiable culture of poverty among people who are economically and socially marginalized in a capitalist society. In order to survive they develop patterns of behavior characteristic of a particular culture: low aspirations, political apathy, disorganization, helplessness, and a belittling of what they consider middle-class values. As a consequence people who are poor foster devices that tend to perpetuate poverty, even if structural situations change. Lewis estimated that about twenty million Americans lived within such a culture.[5] Governments and voluntary agencies in these circumstances can do little to help, other than to provide relief food and other supplies. On the positive side his conclusions emphasized the relationship between poverty and people's attitudes and behavior. However, his thesis is correctly criticized because he based his analysis on the now discredited modern definition of culture, namely, that a culture is a unitary and internally coherent set of qualities shaping an *entire* group's behavior. Second, he assumed that cultures are static realities from generation to generation and that individuals can have little or no influence in breaking through the status quo.[6]

4. See Pete Alcock, *Understanding Poverty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4.

5. See Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez* (New York: Random House, 1961), and idem, "The Culture of Poverty," *Scientific American* 215 (October 1966): 19–25.

6. For a critique of Lewis's thesis see Charles A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Mario L. Small and Katherine Newman, "Urban Poverty After the Truly Disadvantaged: The

Social exclusion

There are cultures of poverty, but because the term has been misinterpreted by Lewis and others, some academics especially in Europe prefer to use the expression "cultures as stigmatized patterns of social exclusion." People experience social exclusion when, for a variety of factors beyond their control, they are excluded from participating in key economic, political, and social activities in the society in which they exist.[7] The resources available to these people are so inferior to those commanded by the average individual or group that they are effectively excluded from acceptable living conditions and activities. The term "social exclusion" highlights the immaterial or dehumanizing effects of poverty resulting from this exclusion, such as the experience of powerlessness, shame and stigma, violence, denial of rights, diminished citizenship, and loss of self-worth.[8] Such consequences for people who experience social exclusion are patterns of behavior that can form identifiable cultures as understood in the postmodern sense. Ruth Lister, using Foucault's insights into power, terms these patterns the "relational" qualities of poverty to indicate that the wider society dictates who are poor and how they should behave. In particular, the manner in which they are referred to and dealt with by politicians, bureaucrats, the mass media, and other dominant groups powerfully affects the wider society's understanding of, and reactions to, people who are labeled poor.[9] These relational qualities will become clearer with the following explanations.

Describing Poverty

We can use the expression "cultures of poverty," therefore, provided the word "culture" is not used in its modern restricted homogeneous sense. In this discussion we will always bear in mind the dehumanizing qualities emphasized by the term "social exclusion." Because the nature and causes of cultures of poverty are so multifaceted, it will be helpful

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Rediscovery of the Family, the Neighborhood, and Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology,* 27 (2001): 23–45.

7. See Tania Burchardt, Julian Le Grand, and David Piachaud, "Degrees of Exclusion: Developing a Dynamic, Multidimensional Measure," in *Understanding Social Exclusion*, eds. John Hills, Julian Le Grand and David Piachaud, 30–43 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

8. See Butler and Watt, *Social Inequality*, 109.

9. See Ruth Lister, *Poverty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 7, and Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 14.

to consider cultures of poverty under the following interconnected headings:

- poverty as income deprivation
- poverty as capability deprivation
- poverty as socially stigmatizing
- poverty as cultural breakdown
- poverty as a culture of violence

Poverty as Income Deprivation

An obvious quality of poverty is the lack of income. On the basis of income there is a distinction between absolute and relative poverty. *Absolute poverty* is defined by a set income measure below which people experience complete destitution and so cannot meet even *minimum* needs for health, food and shelter. The United States is by far the most unequal in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the proportion of long-term poor is relatively high. It has one of the highest rates of poverty in the industrialized world, despite the fact that it has one of the highest average incomes.[10] In 2006, 36.5 million people, approximately one in eight of the population, in the United States were experiencing absolute poverty. In the same year the poverty rate for minors was the highest in the industrialized world, with 21.9 percent of all minors and 30 percent of African-American minors living below the poverty line.

Relative poverty, on the other hand, refers to the lack of resources needed to obtain the kinds of diet, participation in the activities and enjoyment of the living conditions and services that are widely accepted and generally obtained by most people in a particular society.[11] Those who experience this form of poverty have resources so far below those of others in society that they are effectively excluded from the ordinary living arrangements and activities that are considered socially essential.

10. See Jan Pakulski, *Globalising Inequalities: New Patterns of Social Privilege and Disadvantage* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2004), 198-203, and Joel F. Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, *Blame Welfare, Ignore Poverty and Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17–69.

11. John Pierson, *Tackling Social Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 9.

Statistics in 2002 reveal that approximately one in five Britons live in relative poverty and one in eight in Australia.[12]

Cycles of Poverty

People can become so imprisoned by their low income that it is extremely difficult to break through its crushing circumstances. We speak of a "cycle of poverty," simply because the factors referred to are *interconnected*. A family with a very limited income will commonly experience a poor diet, inadequate housing, restricted access to health and educational facilities, unemployment and underemployment because of a lack of qualifications and reduced energy levels.[13] Structural changes such as employment opportunities and specialized educational services are required for most to break the cycle, but few governments are prepared to be so proactive, at least over a long period. By way of example, in Australia's most populous state, New South Wales, in most disadvantaged and remote schools there are "disproportionate numbers of beginning teachers and [they] experience high rates of teacher turnover."[14] Little wonder that children in these areas are poor school achievers.

Poverty as Capability Deprivation

Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, when defining poverty as the "deprivation of opportunities" or simply "capability deprivation," further clarifies the meaning of social exclusion. He believes that economic systems are to be judged successful when people have the capability needed to accomplish critical functionings.[15] These "functionings" may include basic physical needs like being nourished, being sheltered, and breathing fresh air. They may also involve more abstract realities such as possessing self-respect and dignity, sharing in the life of community, and

12. See Simon Burgess and Carol Propper, "The Dynamics of Poverty in Britain," in *Social Exclusion*, eds. Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud, op.cit., 44–61.

13. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 58.

14. N.S.W. Government, "Building on Strong Foundations," reported in *Sydney Morning Herald* (4 April 2005), 6.

15. See Amartya Sen, "Capability and Well-Being," in *The Quality of Life*, eds. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 30–53.

being able to appear in public without shame. Everyone has the right to work, to participate in, and to contribute to society, and to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually,[16] but those who are trapped in a circle of poverty have a restricted range of choices available to them.[17]

Pierre Bourdieu's insights into the nature of class in France further enlighten our understanding of capability deprivation.[18] In his view the Marxist thesis that economic inequalities are the foundation of classes is too restricted because symbolic and cultural elements are also significant in defining class structures. For him class depends on how individuals and groups use a variety of resources in their relationships with others. These resources are divided into different types of "capital"; it is the distribution of these types and the power attached to them that provide the foundation for the class structures in society. People without access to these types of capital experience capability deprivation. Classes develop on the basis of three chief types of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital includes income, wealth, and financial inheritance. Cultural capital[19] includes scarce attributes normally related to education such as knowledge of classical music and of classical literature and art as well as linguistic abilities. This capital is normally passed down from generation to generation and in this sense is difficult to buy or achieve. Social capital embraces the resources that come from social connections or group membership and is mainly acquired and possessed by different classes in different ways. For example, in traditional French working-class communities people often take care of one another's interests by helping to find employment for each other or by exchanging services (e.g., fixing a leaking tap in exchange for mending a punctured car tire). In upper social classes social capital has the same connotation, but it frequently works through arranging such matters as business contacts or looking after the interests of each other's children.

The actual amount of capital is gauged by the sum of economic, cultural, and social capital classes possess, while the makeup of capital is determined by the relative dimensions of the three types of capital.

16. See Mary J. Bane and Lawrence M. Mead, *Lifting Up the Poor: A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty and Welfare Reform* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 2003), 22–23.

17. See Amartya Sen, *Development of Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 87.

18. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

19. Bourdieu is here using "cultural" in the classicist or normative sense.

People with ample economic capital are well positioned to improve the composition of their overall capital: for example, a suddenly rich financier may spend his or her money to purchase highly valued art. Or, as Bourdieu explains, "the reconversion of economic capital into educational capital is one of the strategies which enable the business bourgeoisie to maintain the position of some or all of its heirs."[20] On the other hand, people who are economically poor have limited opportunities to achieve cultural and social capital.

Bourdieu's term "habitus" further helps to explain why upward mobility for people who are poor can be so difficult. Habitus is the socially formed and interiorized readiness of people to think, perceive, and act in certain ways (see chap. 1). For example, he argues, children of French working-class families are seriously disadvantaged if they try to "break into" the educational systems that are biased in favor of the habitus of the middle class. Middle/upper-class children learn to speak with what Basil Bernstein terms an "elaborated code" in contrast to a working-class "restricted code."[21] In addition, the privileged children are taught at home and school the "correct" mannerisms, values, and types of recreation unique to social classes. Little wonder that working-class children can be made to feel inferior and excluded by middle-class pupils and teachers.

Reflecting on the recreational habitus of different classes in France, Bourdieu in 1984 argued that working-class sports tend to be noticeably physical, even violent, such as boxing and soccer. Middle-class sports, by contrast, are far less physically demanding and rather emphasize the social networking that accompanies them, for example, skiing or golf. He further contends that in these dissimilar class habitus there are different approaches to the human body. The body is viewed by working-class people as an instrument to achieve some external purpose: for example, the person who digs drains must develop strong muscular skills. People belonging to the middle classes, on the other hand, perceive their bodies as the primary focus of shaping for aesthetic and social reasons.[22] From early childhood working-class children are socialized

20. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 136–37.

21. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), xiii–xiv.

22. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," in *Rethinking Popular Culture*, eds. Michael Schudson and Chandra Mukerji, 357–73 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Philip Smith and Alexander Riley, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 264–68.

to view their bodies in ways that reinforce their feeling of social exclusion from middle-class society.

Poverty as Socially Stigmatizing

A *stigma* is a culturally recognized quality that is used by people who hold power to stereotype and discredit others. A particular stigma disqualifies those so marked from full social acceptance. The stigma may be physical (e.g., a bodily deformity), mental, related to age (e.g., elderly), behavioral, or social (e.g., an ethnic group, the unemployed, people of low income). The identification of the stigma is used to reduce the person from a complex whole to a single, tainted, and discounted characteristic upon which all social interaction by the dominant power group with the person will be based.[23]

For example, in Australia poverty is generally seen as the victim's problem and not as a multifaceted cultural issue.[24] As Mark Peel, an authority on Australian poverty, commented in 2003: "Some politicians and public policy-makers [have] even created fictional stories to demonise welfare recipients; in the absence of sufficiently dramatic empirical evidence, fiction does just as well."[25] Likewise in the United States people who are poor, especially if they are single mothers, African-Americans, or Hispanics, are commonly demonized by governments. Poverty is the fault of individuals rather than of the structural realities of society. Welfare only makes people lazier. Therefore, if people are forced into work it is assumed that poverty disappears, when in fact it only increases.[26]

A stigma is a highly subjective issue, both for the stigmatized and for the stigmatizers, affecting the identity of people at the deepest level. Both groups can internalize the scripts that portray some with less-than-humanity and others with full humanity.[27] Shame is a most likely result

23. See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1963).

24. See Alistair Greig, Frank Lewins, and Kevin White, *Inequality in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94.

25. Mark Peel, *The Lowest*, 172.

26. See Handler and Hasenfeld, *Blame Welfare*, 1–16; Pakulski, *Globalising Inequalities*, 157–81.

27. In 1976, in a study of attitudes of senior Maori college students in New Zealand, I found that 73 percent accepted the dominant culture's view of their inferiority by agreeing to the statement that "Maoris have above-average gifts for manual or semi-manual work." Teachers said that when these students of average

when the stigma of poverty is internalized.[28] People feel worthless, of no credibility, second-class citizens, even genetically inferior as human persons. Most of us at some stage experience some of these feelings, but people who are stigmatized by society, such as people who are socioeconomically poor, or those mentally ill, are made to experience these feelings every day of their lives. A sense of fatalism and hopelessness can grip them as their sense of self-worth and self-respect disintegrates. The psalmist describes the inner pain of people who have been socially marginalized because of their poverty: "You have caused my companions to shun me, you have made me a thing of horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape" (Ps 88:8). People can give up trying to cope with the endless stigmatizing pressures of prejudice, poverty, unemployment; human dignity cannot be subjected to endless indignities and remain intact. As one Australian Aboriginal person declared with sadness: "Look at me—I'm colored and I'm dirty, drunken, lazy and irresponsible, like they say—that's my privilege, because I'm Aboriginal—I can do as I like, because that's what they expect of me anyway." Little wonder if at times this sense of hopelessness can be a catalyst for violent outbursts of frustration.

Consumption, Tastes, and Stigmatizing

Zygmunt Bauman, an experienced interpreter of postmodernity, writes that "the poor of a consumer society are socially defined, and self-defined, first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient—in other words, inadequate—consumers."[29] Not only is it an issue of what goods they select to purchase but also their quality, for example new or second hand, branded or not, and their source, such as ordinary retailers or informal options like garage sales. In a British study of low-income families and their experience of the stigma attached to having to purchase cheap goods, it was found that "social identities are increasingly being defined by expenditure [and] . . . families can experience social exclusion in simple and painful ways."[30]

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or above-average ability found their studies hard they would quickly lose confidence in themselves, saying: "What's the use! We Maoris don't have the skills anyway."

28. See Lister, *Poverty*, 117–23.

29. Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), 38.

30. Augusta Stephenson, *Work and Welfare: Attitudes, Experiences and Behaviour of Nineteen Low Income Families* (London: Analytical Services Division of the Department of Social Security, 2001), 51.

Herbert Gans writes of "taste cultures" to explain why some groups of people prefer certain kinds of foods and clothing. He explains that taste cultures are "aggregates of similar people making similar choices, and aggregates of similar content chosen by the same people."[31] Individual tastes are to some degree formed by education and economic class. But the most sophisticated theory of taste cultures comes from Bourdieu. When analyzing the processes of demonizing people who are poor he draws attention to the profoundly symbolic power of taste. In his definition of the habitus of a distinctive class he significantly emphasizes the connection between emotions and culture. This habitus is "the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world," and these dispositions incorporate not only "learned thought and attitudes, but also modes of feeling—in other words, dispositions have both cognitive and affective components."[32] Cultural tastes of different classes classify themselves in oppositional terms: "taste is first and foremost the distaste of the tastes of others."[33]

Bourdieu illustrates how class interaction includes the domain of taste; the way that classes categorize themselves on the basis of taste is symbolically fundamental to maintaining class power. Groups with power regard their own tastes and lifestyles as superior, thus, for example, opposing high-priced brand clothing to cheap mass-produced items, golf to bingo. This, he writes, is an exercise of "symbolic violence," that is, a dominant group claims that a specific taste is legitimate while they hide the power dynamics that form the foundation of their strength. Their tastes are pure, while others are impure. This approach by Bourdieu is reminiscent of Douglas's analysis of the symbolic power of "non-dirt" and "dirt" when applied to cultural analysis. When classes define themselves as clean or pure they believe they have authority to control or oppress people whose tastes dare to differ from theirs.[34] Those who do not share the tastes of my class are inferior to me. Bethany Bryson, using Bourdieu's analysis, claimed that in the United States members of the middle class generally value "anything but heavy metal." They have a distaste for the melodic tastes characteristic of groups socially the most distant from them, such

31. See Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture: An Analysis of Evaluation and Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 582.

32. See Butler and Watt, *Social Inequality*, 173–74.

33. Loic J. D. Wacquant, "Pierre Bourdieu," in *Key Sociological Thinkers,* ed. Rob Stones (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998), 223.

34. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977).

as the poor or working-class people who happen to enjoy heavy metal, and African-Americans, who prefer hip-hop and rap.[35]

Poverty as Cultural Breakdown

A culture provides people with a sense of identity, belonging, and security. Consequently they can be emotionally and psychologically devastated if their culture is dramatically undermined. For example, it is impossible to understand poverty among Indigenous Australians today if we ignore what some describe as a history of cultural genocide, the consequence of racism, lack of understanding, and neglect. They have passed as a people through almost every kind of negative experience short of total extermination.[36] Indigenous peoples in some parts of the world have materially improved their conditions, but, concludes Paul Havemann, their life chances and prospects for survival "as peoples, at present reflect 'nautonomy,' not autonomy."[37] Applying Foucault's notion of power, Havemann calls the barrier to revitalization "nautonomy," which he defines as a powerlessness embedded in the key sites of power, such as the legal, political, and coercive systems of the state, education, and welfare services.

Poverty as a Culture of Violence

Violence is about abusing *people*. It is not confined to physical violence, but it is also the creation of cultural conditions that materially or psychologically destroy or diminish people's dignity, rightful happiness, and capacity to fulfill basic material needs. For this reason we can speak of poverty as a culture of violence. Here are some examples of this violence in the Western world.

35. See Bethany Bryson, "Anything But Heavy Metal: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes," *American Sociological Review* 61 (October 1996): 884–99.

36. See Henry Reynolds, "New Frontiers: Australia," in *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand*, ed. Paul Havemann, 129–40 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

37. Paul Havemann, "Indigenous Peoples, the State and the Challenge of Differentiated Citizenship," in *Indigenous Peoples' Rights*, 470 .

1. Impact of neo-capitalism[38]

Over the last thirty years there has been a revival of nineteenth-century capitalism, the effects of which impact especially people who are poor. It is variously called "neo-capitalism," "neo-liberalism," even "market fundamentalism," because its theoretical foundations could not be questioned until the global economic meltdown beginning in 2008. Its ideological assumptions are: profit is the sole measure of value; greed is good when it fuels economic growth; sustained economic growth is the best way to distribute wealth; free markets, unrestrained by government interference, result in the most efficient use of resources; there need be only minimal concern for the environment; there should be lower taxation for the well-off and reduced government spending, especially for the benefit of people who are poor; trade unions ought to be broken up. Public institutions are to be pseudo-businesses. In the United States most policy makers have long considered healthcare an economic commodity that must be subject to the principles of supply and demand in the marketplace. Even in Australia, which has universal healthcare, health policy makers have gradually shifted their concern from equity and social justice to cost containment and, more recently, to cost-effectiveness.[39]

One common assumption of neo-capitalism is the false Social Darwinist supposition that the best adapted and most successful social groups survive, and have a right to do so, in a world of conflicting qualities. Taken to an extreme this implies that, consequently, the poor are not fit enough to survive.[40] Welfare services only make poverty worse and reduce the incomes of the wealthy. Hence there has been a "rolling back" of social and welfare services,[41] contributing to further inequalities and the emergence of the new "working poor." In the United States welfare reform did lead to a decrease in unemployment for single mothers, but its former

38. For a fuller development of the relationship between postmodernity and violence see Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 153–214.

39. See Hal Swerissen and Steve Duckett, "Health Policy and Financing," in *Health Policy in Australia*, ed. Heather Gardner (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.

40. See John Wright, *The Ethics of Economic Rationalism* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003), 123–37.

41. See Peter Saunders, *The Ends and Means of Welfare: Coping with Economic and Social Change in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 181–83.

welfare recipients have fallen farther into poverty, earning less than they would have had on welfare.[42] The approximately 60 percent of the general population who are unemployed do not qualify for welfare benefits at all, which is especially tragic in times of economic recession.[43]

2. Normalization of violence

The gambling policies of governments such as those in Australia and the United States are an example of normalizing violence in cultures. Indirect taxation through poker machines falls excessively on people who are poor. A disproportionate share of problem gamblers are also drawn from the lower socioeconomic sections, and the socioeconomically disadvantaged geographical areas are particularly targeted by the companies owning these machines. Since the governments concerned gain financially significant amounts from gambling revenues they are not likely to change their policies radically in favor of people who are poor unless there is public pressure to do so.[44]

3. Affluenza

The ideology of neo-capitalism promotes the belief that higher and higher consumption of material goods will lead to a happier society. This is contributing to the personal and social disease in the Western world called "affluenza," an extreme form of materialism in which consumers overwork and accumulate high levels of debt to purchase more and more goods. This unbalanced pursuit of material goods results in various kinds of personal and social stress, anxieties, addictions, feelings of guilt and shame as people struggle "to keep up with the Joneses." The disease is so rampant that some term it "the all-consuming epidemic."[45] In these

42. See Pakulski, *Globalising Inequalities*, 200; for an overview of the social effects of welfare reform see *The Promise of Welfare Reform: Political Rhetoric and the Reality of Poverty in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Keither M. Kilty and Elizabeth A. Segal (New York: Howarth, 2006).

43. See *The Economist* (3 January 2009), 26–27.

44. In 2002 approximately 13 percent of the total Victorian State Government (Australia) income came from poker machines. See www.salvationarmy.org.au/media/2002/02/02424.

45. See John de Graff, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), and Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

circumstances we can expect little concern for people who are genuinely poor or for the care of the environment.

4. Not listening

Thinking about justice and how to achieve it begins by first listening to people who experience injustice.[46] Only in very recent times have researchers and government policy makers begun to include in their studies of the causes and relief of poverty the personal views and expertise of people who are poor. They were thought to have nothing to offer. On two occasions while researching on remote islands south of New Zealand I was marooned without food and shelter and each time I was instantly befriended by families. Despite their extreme poverty they cared for me for several days, asking nothing in return. For decades newspaper reporters and government officials had demonized the islanders as lazy and unintelligent, yet how wrong they were! Despite their extremely limited resources I found them caring and creative. If officials had listened to them with respect they would have discovered the real causes of their poverty and the way they could have moved forward in collaborative fashion.

Theological Reflection

The Scriptures, which are not against wealth as such but are opposed to the acquisitiveness and greed that are valued as "virtues" in neocapitalist economics, call us, even in the rich Western world, to view all our actions through the lens of a "preferential option for the poor." There must be a willingness, while maintaining good stewardship, to risk not just our surplus, but even our capital resources in the service of people who are poor. Finally, we are called to listen to and to learn from people who are disadvantaged; Jesus Christ has a special love of people who are poor because, like him, they are powerless and rejected.[47] Theologians who fail to respond to these foundational faith imperatives can scarcely become authentic interpreters of the Scriptures.

46. For excellent examples of how this can be done see Anthony J. Gittins, *Where There's Hope There's Life: Women's Stories of Homelessness and Survival* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2006), and Peel, *The Lowest*.

47. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *A "Preferential Option for the Poor": Application to Catholic Health and Aged Care Ministries in Australia* (Canberra: Catholic Health Australia, 2008), 19–59.

Chapter 5

Cultures as Narratives Negotiating Identities

> Now it is myth as narration that puts the present experience . . . into relation with the totality of meaning.
>
> —Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*[1]

> At any given time . . . we are not just negotiating our localities or positions *vis-à-vis* race, class, gender, and nationality, but also positionalities within a geopolitical system.
>
> —Eduardo Mendieta, "Identities: Postcolonial and Global"[2]

One day a group of villagers in Fiji wanted to explain to me what membership in a credit union meant for them. Instead of a speech they sang a lengthy ballad (called *meke*), accompanying it with actions. They began by describing the coming of the missionaries and the discovery that Jesus Christ has saved them. Then they sang about how Christ saves them today through the arrival of a credit union in their village, for they have now learned to save money, avoid debt, and spend wisely. This simple incident illustrates the important distinction between myths, as explained in chapter 2, and narratives, which are the subject of this chapter. It also highlights one of the most important functions of storytelling, namely, its ability to bring some theoretical concept down to earth so that it can be grasped at several levels, by the heart as well as intellectually.

1. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 171.

2. Eduardo Mendieta, "Identities: Postcolonial and Global," in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 409.

Myths and Narratives

Myths are the stories that make our lives intelligible in the *past*, but the retelling of these stories in light of *present* needs is what we call narrative. In narratives, myths from the past are applied to what concerns people today, and in the process the myths are enlarged, altered, or even discarded. As with myths, narratives are at the heart of cultures. For the Fijian villagers the coming of salvation through Christ is the myth, but its application to their particular experience of credit union is the narrative.

Every narrative has a plot or purpose that shapes its structure. That is, not only must a narrative be more than one thing following another, but some form of meaningful connection between events is necessary. The connection is provided by the plot of the narrative and the raconteur chooses how to do this, depending on the audience.[3] The plot is the vehicle whereby the overall purpose of the narrative is achieved. As Paul Ricoeur writes: "By plot I mean the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story. . . . A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story."[4] The plot in the villagers' narrative of the founding of their credit union was the mixture of song and action.

Narratives are:

- about creating identity in the here and now, all the while drawing on myths of the past;
- stories that recount in a variety of ways, such as images, music, gestures, but particularly language, a series of temporal events so that a meaningful succession is depicted, which is the plot;
- everywhere, to be found in all forms of human communication, so much so that human beings can be called "narrating animals."

Thus narratives are stories that are able to provide people with a sense of order, identity, and meaning within and beyond time. They are innately interesting because they entertain, enlighten, engage, provoke, validate, and reflect existence at the same time. The narrator is in control, so listeners are compelled to see reality from a different perspective, even if they do not agree with it. Even music, with its ability to evoke

3. See Anthony Kerby, *Narrative and Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 39.

4. Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (January 1980): 171.

meaning and emotions in ways no words or pictures are able to do, can be a narrative in which the composer creates the plot through particular musical arrangements. Consider how Frederic Chopin imbues the musical plot of his "Military Polonaise in A" with his own nostalgic nationalistic feeling. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the links between identities and narratives, but we must first describe why narratives are particularly important in postmodernity.

Postmodern Identities

- One symptom of this postmodern age is the dramatic breakdown globally and locally of traditional identities and boundaries. The quickening movement of people, goods, and information has encouraged widespread anxieties. Unease over identity is nourishing ambivalent attitudes toward ethnic mixing, immigration, international investment, and supranational organizations. There is an increasing search by nations, minority groups, institutions, business firms, and individuals to redefine their identities in order to clarify what makes them unique in the global scene.[5] More and more people are asserting their difference or uniqueness. Thus when Greenland, despite its tiny population of fifty-six thousand and very limited income resources, voted in 2008 to loosen its ties with Denmark, the premier commented that at last Greenlanders could tell their own story to the world.[6] In the United States, Native Americans clamor to reaffirm the identity they fear is being lost, African-Americans hunt for their African origins, and white Americans revive the cookery and clothing styles that characterized their ancestors. Young people create languages, gestures, music, and clothing styles to distinguish themselves from older generations.
- Rarely is the search for identity without controversy. Sometimes it is violent, fueled by a fundamentalist escapism. Suicide bombers testify in ways we never expected to the power of identity and meaning in human lives. Disconnected in their storied worlds from wider significance, people become anxious, angry, even deadly. Most often the search for identity is peaceful, but it is always a painful and uncertain journey.

5. See Linda Martin Alcoff, "Identities: Modern and Postmodern," in *Identities,* eds. Alcoff and Mendieta, 1–8.

6. See *The Economist* (17 March 2007): 64–65.

Reflexive Identities

There is still the popular modern view, a further relic of Enlightenment thinking, that the self is an autonomous, stable, structural entity composed of factors and traits that "add up" to a total person without their active involvement and transcending their particular place in culture, language, and history.[7] However, it is increasingly obvious in this postmodern world that identity is a process of "self-engaging-with-context."[8] Take myself. My Australian passport defines me as born in New Zealand on a certain date, but there is more to my identity than this general statement. My specific identities are constantly changing, depending on the context. In certain contexts I am a religious, in others I am a priest, at times I am a New Zealander, at other times I am a patriotic Australian, at others I am an anthropologist, a lecturer. Individual identity is less and less a question of conforming to definite, set roles, and more and more an issue of trying to make sense of who I am through monitoring my own actions depending on the ever-changing context in which I find myself. It involves at times a complicated process of decision making in face of manifold social situations. It is as though I am constantly telling stories to myself to remind me of my identity at a particular time and in the particular context I happen to be in. Sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to this process as the "reflexive self," that is, a process whereby "self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives,"[9] a point to be further explained later in this chapter.

In summary, who we are is primarily to be found in the way we live day by day within a particular cultural context or environment, not just in what we think or say about ourselves. Identity is always a process of "being" or "becoming," never a final and settled issue. In fact, each individual or group of people occupies multiple and sometimes even contradictory identities, which interact and give the individual or group different options for action. It is an increasingly complicated and contentious process because relationships and power must be forever negotiated, owing to the ever-increasing speed of change both locally and

7. See Frank Johnson, "The Western Concept of Self," in *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives,* ed. Anthony J. Marsella, George Devos, and Francis L. Hsu, 91–138 (New York: Tavistock, 1985).

8. Thomas K. Fitzgerald, *Metaphors of Identity: A Culture-Communication Dialogue* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), ix.

9. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 244.

globally. For example, in a study of Northern Ireland Protestant and Catholic communities in the midst of conflict it was found that individuals are constantly having to negotiate definitions of themselves and other people during day-to-day interactions and storytelling.[10]

Cultural and Personal Identities

As for the individual, so for cultures. Until recent times social sciences interpreted collective identities also as relatively stable categories, related to such social groupings as class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, or race. It was assumed that each culture has a unique, unchanging, well-rounded identity or essence that transcends all changes and is independent of the wider context, and all individuals share cultural identity equally. However, as we have seen, this is not the case. In postmodernity, so far from being eternally set in some essentialized past, identities—whether cultural or individual—are subject to the ongoing interplay of history, culture, and power.[11] Cultures have been intermixing from time immemorial. Every culture is an ongoing hybrid creation. There is no such thing as a "pure identity" abstracted from social relations and history.[12]

Interconnecting Personal and Cultural Identities

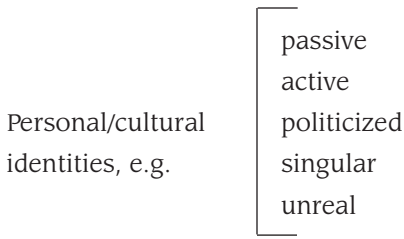

Figure 5.1

10. See Anthony D. Buckley and Mary C. Kenney, *Negotiating Identity: Rhetoric, Metaphor, and Social Drama in Northern Ireland* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

11. See Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity,* ed. James Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225.

12. See Anselm Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity* (London: Martin Robertson, 1977), 164.

People have multiple identities (see Figure 5.1), but which one is chosen will depend largely on the particular cultural situation the person happens to be in. Harriet Bradley detects three types of cultural identity: passive, active, and politicized.[13] "Passive identities" are potential identities inasmuch as they originate from a series of relationships such as class, gender, ethnicity, but they are not at the moment being acted on. People are generally unaware of their passive identities unless a situation emerges in which they need consciously to define themselves according to particular relationships. For example, when I lecture in the United States I am not conscious of the fact that I have an Australian passport, unless of course I am at the immigration section at the Los Angeles airport. "Active identities" are those that individuals are consciously aware of, even though they may not continually use these identities. These identities can operate as a self-defense reaction or because people are being defined in a negative way through an experience of discrimination. For example, once in Belfast I was refused a taxicab ride because I am a Catholic priest. Women realize the importance of gender when they suffer discrimination simply because they are women. "Politicized identities," on the other hand, refer to situations in which individuals *constantly* regard themselves in terms of a particular identity. For example, the feminist movement has persuaded many women to assume a politicized female identity.

Finally, there are two particularly negative types of identity, namely, "identity disregard" or "unreal identity," and "singular affiliation."[14] "Identity disregard," popular with many economic theorists, assumes that people are totally unaffected by what is happening around them, but with one exception; they are narcissistic and single-minded in the pursuit of personal economic gain. Often they are referred to as "the economic man [*sic*]" or "the rational agent," a fantasy of the authors' imaginations. "Singular affiliation" is when individuals choose, or have imposed on them, one identity to the exclusion of any other and this can lead to dangerous forms of religious or political fundamentalism. For example, white supremacists in the United States, who destroy property and kill, claim this is lawful because God is calling them to keep their country "pure Anglo-Saxon."[15]

13. See Harriet Bradley, *Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 25–26.

14. See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin, 2006), 19–29.

15. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 197–99.

The Clash of Civilizations

In 1996 Samuel Huntington, a Harvard political scientist, published his controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations*,[16] in which he argues that we have reached a phase in history, following the end of the Cold War, when the clash of ideologies has ended. In his view cultural identity will become more important in determining friendships within and conflicts between "civilizations." With the decline in the influence of Western nations the world will be dominated by six "civilizations": the West, Islam, a Confucian bloc, a Hindu bloc, Latin America, and eastern Orthodox Christianity. The "central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states."[17]

For Huntington civilizations represent distinct cultural groupings of people, but this is where the author's thinking is seriously in error. His adoption of the discredited modern definition of culture—that cultures are rigidly discrete, homogeneous structures—undermines his thesis. For example, he wrongly assumes that everyone in Islamic countries shares the same values. It is true that religious and ethnic fundamentalism is on the rise, but there is little evidence that conflict is increasingly between blocs of "civilizations." For example, there are serious conflicts between Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia, which happen to belong to the same "civilization" according to Huntington's thesis. "Islam," according to the author, is monolithic, despite the fact that it consists of factions that are more hostile than mutually friendly. He overlooks the reality that the Chinese business elite are much more interested in the technical skills of Silicon Valley in California than in their Confucian past.

In summary, Huntington's theory is fundamentally naïve and potentially dangerous because it is built on a faulty understanding of culture.[18] Cultures are considered to have inflexible structures that determine the shape of his arguments. Supposedly homogeneous, consistent cultural profiles are played off against each other.[19] His thesis is a deliberate, demagogic combination of security interests and an unscholarly statement of civilizational (cultural) differences. As anthropologist Jan Pieterse

16. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

17. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 48.

18. See *The Economist* (3 January 2009), 29.

19. See the critique by Dieter Senghass, *The Clash Within Civilizations: Coming to Terms with Cultural Conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1 and *passim.*

concludes, "it merges two existing enemy discourses, the 'fundamentalist threat' of Islam and the 'yellow peril,' and its novelty lies in combining them."[20] It is a perilous mix.

Identities Through Narratives

Given that contemporary identities are increasingly fragmented, blurred, and unstable, the key question is: how are people at the personal, group, and cultural levels to attain reassuring identities? Identities are clarified in one of two ways, didactically or experientially. When the didactic approach is used people are told who they are; this is the "mug" and "jug" approach in which learning occurs almost entirely at the intellectual level. The recipient of a preset identity is like an empty mug waiting to receive information poured into her or him from the source of knowledge, the jug. This is a passive method of learning in which people are not required to examine their own emotional response to identities handed down from above.

On the other hand, in the experiential approach people negotiate for themselves and others who they are and who they are not. Through storytelling, individuals write and rewrite the story of their selves and the many worlds in which they live. In describing this process, which is especially important in postmodernity, Giddens comments that "the narrative of self has in fact to be continually re-worked, and lifestyle practices brought into line with it," and in consequence "life-style choices are constitutive of the reflexive narrative of self."[21] Individuals are constantly reflecting through storytelling on their experiences in order to define their changing identities and create a sense of personal stability. As individuals construct stories from experience, so also do groups of all kinds: business organizations, communities, governments, and nations assemble preferred narratives that feelingly tell them who they are at this moment in time, where they come from, what is good or bad, and how they are to organize themselves and maintain their sense of unique identity in a changing world. There is a complex relationship between narrative, time, and memory, for we amend and edit the remembered past to fit with our identities and context at the present moment. For

20. Jan N. Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 43–44.

21. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 75.

example, when I talked to my aging mother about the thrills of flying in small one-engine planes in mountainous Papua New Guinea I definitely did not tell her about the dangerous nature of these flights. I prudently did a little editing!

"Metanarratives" and Identities

Jean-François Lyotard describes as grand narratives, or "metanarratives," theories that claim to give all-embracing explanations and draw on the authority this gives them. The grand narratives of the last two centuries, such as Marxism and capitalism, are no longer important because they have failed to achieve their visions.[22] In place of grand metanarratives there are "little narratives" celebrating variety and differences and making no claim to universal knowledge. Individuals and especially minority groups must be given space to tell their own different stories and we must concentrate, says Lyotard, on these little narratives as a way to stand up against the authoritarianism of grand narratives.

His claim that grand narratives have ceased to be important is somewhat discredited since we can observe the dramatic development of new grand theories such as religious fundamentalism and even market fundamentalism. However, Lyotard is right to the extent that there continues to be a dramatic rise in new small narratives such as an increase in ethnic consciousness and the ongoing vitality of traditional cultures. The speed of globalization and the questioning of Enlightenment assumptions of superiority have encouraged new ways of thinking about the human person and society. As Charles Lemert writes: "the destabilizing of the modern world is associated with a curious, but undeniable, energizing of identity as the topic of widespread political interest."[23]

22. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

23. Charles Lemert, *Postmodernism Is Not What You Think* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 128.

Cultural Narratives

> Discourse we tolerate; to story we attend.
>
> —Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent*[24]

As has been explained, myth and narrative are two sides of the one coin. Narrative is the actual recounting of the myth, but within changing times and in the process of retelling the myth itself is altered or modified according to the circumstances of time and place. The following examples of different types of narratives within cultures will illustrate these points.

Narrative Types

Figure 5.2

Narratives of Composure

Alistair Thomson concludes that "composure" is a suitable word to define a process whereby people through narratives try to accomplish a

24. Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.

feeling of composure or peace about their past.[25] In 1915 Australian and New Zealand soldiers (subsequently called by the acronym "Anzac") suffered on the beaches of Gallipoli, in the Dardanelles, a crushing defeat at the hands of Turkish forces, due in no small part to the incompetence of British generals and politicians. Some ten thousand troops were killed and thousands wounded. Yet the public narratives of this event overlook these painful and tragic facts to emphasize instead the positive experiences of comradeship among the troops, their natural intelligence, endurance, personal bravery, and even the birth of the Australian national identity.[26] This is an image of the past that people can comfortably live with. Another example of narrative composure occurred recently in Japan. A competition was launched for the best essay to deny Japan's wartime role as an aggressor and sponsor of atrocities, and it was won by the then head of Japan's air force. In his revisionist narrative he writes that Japan fought a war of self-defense. Pearl Harbor was an American-laid trap. The author ironically ends his essay with the words: "for a country that denies its own history is destined to fall."[27]

Narratives of Cultural Romanticism

The term "traditional culture" is commonly used with respect by many indigenous peoples to refer to their cultures before colonization. However, the term is increasingly understood in postmodern anthropology as an invention constructed for contemporary purposes rather than a stable, objectively based narrative handed on from the past. To illustrate this point, anthropologist Allan Hanson focuses on the development of "traditional culture" among the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori.[28] The Maori have been reduced to second-class citizenship since the coming of British settlers in the 1840s. Resentment against this social and economic marginalization and a desire to be acknowledged as the original owners of the land have given rise to a narrative called *Maoritanga* (Maoriness). In this narrative New Zealand's white majority is negatively pictured as ruthlessly rational, individualistic, greedy, passionless, and mechanical.

25. See Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).

26. See Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People—Myths of State* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 121–47.

27. See *The Economist* (8 November 2008): 41.

28. See Allan Hanson, "The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and its Logic," *American Anthropologist* 91 (1989): 890–902.

On the other hand, *Maoritanga* is positively presented as emotional, concerned for others, family-oriented, passionate, deeply spiritual, united with the land, and natural. The negative qualities of Maori life before and after colonization are ignored in this culturally romantic narrative. Anthropologist Roger Keesing writes of the romanticism involved: "Maori and Aboriginal Australian ideologues are engaged in reconstructing ancestral pasts characterized by Mystical Wisdom, Oneness with the Land, Ecological Reverence, and Social Harmony."[29] He then describes the way warfare and violence, including Maori cannibalism, are carefully edited out of this rewritten history. Violence against women, commoners, and slaves, along with cannibalism, were to be found in all parts of New Zealand. But new narratives, whether objectively true or not, aim to offer the Maori a romanticized alternative view of history that they can affirm as authentically their own. A similar narrative of nationalistic composure is to be found among indigenous Hawaiians. This narrative pictures pre-European life as "egalitarian, pious, and generous, ignoring historical evidence of hierarchy, oppression, and cruelty."[30]

Narratives of Nationalism

Sometimes individuals such as politicians seek to impose narratives of identities on people, selectively manipulating history for their purposes. What we believe to be traditions passed from generation to generation through the mists of time may actually have been deliberately invented by politically motivated people fewer than two hundred years ago. It is thought, for example, that Scottish people have all worn kilts and played bagpipes from time immemorial. But my lowland ancestors certainly did not, because it was all a political invention for nationalistic purposes in the early nineteenth century.

New nationalistic narratives can rapidly receive widespread support. Nazism is an example of "politicized identity," as earlier described, inasmuch as this cult demanded total allegiance from its followers. The Nazis, provoked by resentment of Germany's failure and humiliation after World War I, developed a narrative of the "pure German," untainted by the blood of "impure peoples" such as Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, intellectually handicapped, or black people.

29. Roger Keesing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific* 1 (1989): 19; see also Roger Sandall, *The Culture Cult: Designer Tribalism and Other Essays* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2001), 3–17.

30. Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 132.

Less dramatic nationalistic narratives are common in today's postmodern world of confused identities. For example, the rise of a right-wing political party in Australia in the 1990s sought to redefine Australian identity fundamentally in terms of white Australian immigrants and their descendants, thus ignoring and denigrating Indigenous Australians and Asian immigrants. Similar efforts to redefine "Britishness" through narratives continue in the United Kingdom due to such factors as increased immigration from Islamic countries and levels of political devolution in Wales and Scotland.[31] In 1987 the Minister of Education proposed as a matter of urgency that a national curriculum be introduced in British schools to guarantee the continuation of an authentic British narrative and national identity. He stated: "There is so much distraction, variety and uncertainty . . . that in our country today our children are in danger of losing any sense at all of a common culture and a common heritage." He ends with this statement: "The cohesive role of the national curriculum will provide our society with a greater sense of identity."[32] At first sight these comments look logical and innocent, but the proposed national curriculum reflected an imperialist concept of a static Anglo-Saxon culture that had ceased to exist. The reality is that through immigration the ethnic mixture is significantly diversifying. Any curriculum must mirror this. Moreover, the qualities of the former imperial Britain were very much the construct of an upper-class system from which especially the working class was excluded. Contemporary "Britishness" is not something to be defined by one class or ethnic group.

Narratives of Minorities

Two examples illustrate the significance of narratives of minorities. In his speech in Chicago marking his success at the elections Barack Obama acknowledged that American voters had negotiated a new narrative of identity because they had elected the first African-American as president: "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment change has come to America."[33]

Notting Hill, a London suburb, has the biggest annual urban street carnival in Britain, attracting around a million spectators of various

31. See *The Economist* (14 January 2007), 48–49.
32. Kenneth Baker, in *The Times Literary Supplement* (25 September 1987): 5.
33. Barack Obama, cited in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (6 November 2008): 1.

backgrounds, where the performers are mostly low-income African-Caribbean people from the West Indies. They are immigrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s and their descendants. At first the immigrants settled in Notting Hill, then a poor section of London, where they had to struggle against significant racial discrimination, even experiencing the violence of race riots. Over time they were forced to move elsewhere as the suburb became increasingly transformed into a high-income residential area. However, in the face of continued local opposition, they return annually to the streets of Notting Hill to experience "active identity," as described earlier in this chapter. In brilliantly colored masquerade parades and mas bands the participants use narrative themes such as Africa and the abolition of slavery. Africa before slavery is most frequently chosen because it is the imaginary homeland of West Indians. The plot in the narrative is the need to negotiate an identity in a hostile milieu; participants take an original myth about African origins and history and rewrite it to suit the contemporary scene. The carnival is thus a celebratory narrative of West Indian belonging and identity in the midst of a racially discriminatory atmosphere.[34]

Narratives of Refounding

Paul Ricoeur writes that narratives can evoke the revitalization of the moral imagination of people because of their singular power to revision reality. This is because narrative allows people to "try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world."[35] The reader's world is suddenly questioned by the narrative. New and imaginative possibilities of being and acting are presented to them. What is found in the story's plot has the radical ability to "disturb and rearrange"[36] the reader's own relation to life. Listeners or readers are drawn into the raconteur's experiences; they are invited to enter the narrator's perspective on life and to participate in profound individual and cultural changes.

34. See Kimura Yoko, "The Notting Hill Carnival in London: A Study on Masbands, Masquerading Groups of an Urban Festival," *Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology* 7 (2006): 85–96.

35. Paul Ricoeur, "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality," in *Man and World* 12 (1970): 134.

36. Paul Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, eds. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 6.

This describes the narrative of refounding, the process whereby people relive the founding mythology of a group and are so inspired by the experience that they imaginatively and creatively search for ways to relate it to contemporary life. When Blessed Mother Teresa told of her care of dying individuals she would return to the founding mythology of her faith, a story of Christ's compassion for people on the margins of society. This motivated her to change her own life. Many observers were so disturbed by her stories that they also felt impelled to alter their own lives and challenge society's neglect of disadvantaged people.

In his presidential inaugural speech Barack Obama reminds Americans of their founding mythology, in which God calls them to participate in a new Exodus, a new journey from the chaos of poverty and oppression to a land of promise. The nation is again in chaos, so Obama invites Americans to re-own this mythology and join him in the narrative of refounding the nation with the courage, imagination, and creativity of the original founders: " Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils drafted a charter . . . . Those ideals still light the world. . . . Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. . . ."

Narratives of the Marketplace

Successful narrative depends on the ability of storytellers to lead listeners gradually from what they already know and understand to new insights. This is evident in any flourishing advertising campaign in the American business world. The distrust of political dogma and/or any form of abusive power is integral to the founding mythology of the United States, so people who challenge such behavior become popular national heroes and heroines. These rebels venture out alone into the threatening world where they do battle against evil, articulate the problems ordinary folk experience in society, and quickly resolve them. Shrewd advertisers of products build on this mythology and focus on what the brand represents, not how the brand performs. Hence, in the 1990s advertisements for the Apple computer company emphasized the fact that its founders had rebelled against traditional computer systems, advertisements for Harley Davidson motor bikes stressed their links with outlaw bikers, Nike their connections with the African-American ghetto through rebel athlete Michael Jordan.[37]

37. See Douglas B. Holt, "What Becomes an Icon Most?" *Harvard Business Review* 81, no. 3 (March 2003): 43–48.

Identification with this rebellious quality in the American story is constantly exploited by the film industry with its fictional narratives building on the nation's founding mythology. In the Western film genre, as in *Shane* (1953) or *Cat Ballou* (1965), the central character is a strong, self-contained individual unknown to or not fully accepted by society, who has exceptional abilities that are used to defend the powerless against the evil actions of the villain. The once-rejecting society finally accepts the savior. American audiences identify with this type of person, otherwise the Western would not be so enduringly popular. But the narrative must be constantly updated. The plot remains the same, that of "the truly American hero," but the John Wayne of the traditional Westerns is succeeded by the Rambo movies of Sylvester Stallone. The vigorously individualistic, macho, physically strong, thoroughly self-contained and silent person, the "truly American hero," is center stage once more, destroying villains with modern firepower, using helicopters rather than horses, restoring the morale of the American people, and prepared to return at any time when needed to uphold the American way of life.[38] Rambo is succeeded by the high-tech Terminator movies with Arnold Schwarzenegger as the hero. The Batman movies, based on American founding mythology, are also regularly updated in order to maintain their relevance to audiences.

Narratives of Grieving

Narratives of grieving remain an essential precondition for the successful renewal of identity. Grieving is a process whereby loss is formally acknowledged and allowed to slip into the past, after which the future can be confronted with all its uncertainties, fears, and hopes. Frequently, however, groups that have been culturally marginalized experience significant unarticulated grief, that is, the accumulated sadness, fatalism, anger, and loss of identity resulting from their ongoing humiliation and rejection. Where grief is kept hidden and unprocessed in a community we can be sure that hopelessness will be a consequence. There is no energy for constructive change. Grief remains like a powder keg waiting to be ignited into all kinds of individual and community-destroying behavior. Ovid, the first-century Roman poet, well described the reality of unnamed grief: "Suppressed grief suffocates."[39]

38. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 39–41.

39. Ovid, *Tristia,* Book V, eleg. 1, 63.

The voices of many indigenous people calling for political and cultural reconciliation are a poignant example of narratives of grieving. The museums around the world that honor the victims of the Holocaust contain narratives of grieving. In both Old and New Testaments we see many examples of people who, once they began to recount the story of their grief, were able to discover new hope and new visions of society. For example, in the lament psalms the twofold dynamic of grieving is forcefully expressed, namely, the public declaration before God of loss with its crushing sadness and then the energizing identification of what is surprisingly new and hopeful in the experience of individuals or the nation, however faint this might be.[40] The public proclamation of grief can, however, be silenced either because people are too crushed to recount their sadness or because oppressive political powers fear that the public narratives of grief will threaten their own stability. Tyrannical governments particularly fear the public display of grief at funerals of their victims, for it is there that the narratives of sadness can energize people to further resist tyranny. For this reason public funerals of dissidents may be forbidden, as is the case in contemporary China.[41] Even in democracies governments can fear the public display of grieving. Such was the case in the United States under the Bush administration when the American people were forbidden to see on television the return of the coffins of soldiers killed in Iraq.

Theological Reflection

David Tracy defines theology as "the discipline that articulates mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation."[42] If theologians are not able to help people

40. For an understanding of the significant relationship between ritual and cultural change see Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Grieving for Change* (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 1991); idem, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 180–200; and idem, *Healthcare Ministry: Refounding the Mission in Tumultuous Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 271–341.

41. See Walter Brueggemann, *Hope Within History* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 72–91.

42. David Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 62; for an overview of Tracy's understanding of theology and correlation see his article, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 548–70.

relate the Christian fact to contemporary realities they end up talking only to themselves. This chapter reminds theologians that the most powerful method of relating mythologies to daily life is through storytelling in its many forms. The Scriptures are filled with examples. In the Old Testament, for instance, the prophet Nathan has to rebuke David for arranging the death of Uriah in battle so that he could marry Uriah's wife Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:12). Rather than confront David directly, Nathan tells a story about a rich man stealing a lamb from a poor man (2 Sam 12:1-25) and David is enraged when he hears what the wealthy person has done. David has unknowingly described himself. Then Nathan turns to David and says: "You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7). David is mortified and repents. Jesus Christ follows this tradition of storytelling in his use of parables as his principal method of teaching and relating to audiences.[43] There is a lesson here for theologians.

43. See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 40.

Chapter 6

Cultures as Processes of Ritualizing Life

> Ritual forms, like speech forms, [are] transmitters of culture . . . [and] exercise a constraining effect on social behavior.
>
> —Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*[1]

> [Ritual] is an aggregation of symbols . . . [and a] patterned process in time . . . [that] is transformative, [while] ceremony [is] confirmatory.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction; The Forest of Symbols*[2]

In the midst of a workshop on culture for a group of executives in a healthcare facility I announced that the next lecture would be entitled "Ritual—Foundation for Creativity." My audience looked surprised. Ritual surely had nothing to do with health care! Most felt that ritual was synonymous with religion or with grand national events celebrating the traditions of the past. It had nothing at all to do with creativity, certainly nothing to do with industrial inventiveness. How wrong they were! I explained to them that my lecture would help them to see that without ritual they would be unable to communicate with each other and all creativity would cease. In fact, without ritual—an integral quality of all cultures—they could not remain human. The purpose of this chapter is to explain these statements.

1. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 21.

2. Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Process Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 2; idem, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 95.

Defining Ritual

General Definition

A ritual is any prescribed or spontaneous action that follows a set pattern expressing through symbols a public or shared meaning. Prescribed rituals vary from simple gestures such as shaking hands, greeting a person, bowing, to elaborate dramas such as a British royal coronation or the inauguration of an American president. Thus the expression "How do you do?" or "How are you?" as a routine method of starting conversations is a simple prescribed ritual of everyday interaction. Rituals can be spontaneous. For example, when a young man was tragically killed in a car accident on the street not far from my home, total strangers spontaneously placed flowers on the site. People unknown to the family of the deceased wanted to express symbolically to the bereaved their deep human sympathy for the enormity of the loss they had experienced.

It is the capacity of rituals to transform people and their environment, to resolve, prevent, and even cause conflicts that gives them their positive or negative power. Rituals have the power to evoke significant emotional reactions such as the joy of a birthday party.[3] Yet rituals can arouse a whole range of negative emotions, even violent ones. The annual summer parades of the Protestant Orangemen through Catholic suburbs in Northern Ireland's towns and cities can be perceived by Catholics as ritual acts of symbolic warfare, reminding them that their minority status will continue to be enforced.[4] Rituals may create a well-behaved school pupil or a brutal terrorist, a devoted employee or a dictator. Such is their power.

Categories of Definitions

We have just briefly defined ritual, but there are many divergent definitions simply because its qualities are so complex. Most definitions fall into one of two complementary categories: one group stresses the ordering function of ritual in a chaotic world while the other highlights its transformational quality (see Figure 6.1). Victor Turner, however, correctly gives priority to ritual as transformative. He writes: "Ritual is a transformative performance . . . not, in essence, as it is commonly supposed

3. See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 258–59.

4. See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory—Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 197–223.

. . . a prop for social conservatism. . . . Rather does it hold the generative source of culture and structure . . . ."[5] Ritual does at times express and reinforce the existing order, but its primary purpose is ultimately to foster transformative individual and cultural change. Each category of definitions will now be considered.

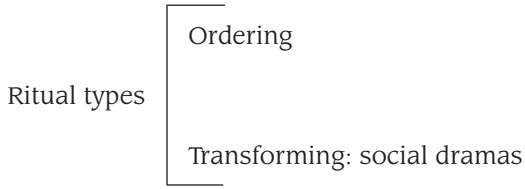

Figure 6.1

Ordering Rituals

Definition

Ritual, a form of storytelling, is the repetitive[6] spontaneous or prescribed symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture to express and articulate meaning within a social context in which there is possible or real tension/conflict and a need to resolve or hide it.[7]

An example is found in Western customs whereby people resolve or hide a tension/conflict between them by shaking hands. This is a stylized gesture of set form that outwardly at least conveys the meaning that peace has been restored. A game of football contains an intricate set of

5. Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 20; see Bobby C. Alexander, "Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner's Theory: An African-American Pentecostal Illustration," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (March 1991): 26.

6. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff note: "Even if [a ritual] is performed once, for the first and only time, its stylistic rigidities, and its internal repetitions of form or content make it traditionlike." See "Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings," in *Secular Ritual*, eds. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen and Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), 8.

7. See Robert Bocock, *Ritual in Industrial Society: A Sociological Analysis of Ritualism in Modern England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), 35–59.

rituals found in the rules of the game that must be observed by the players. If the rules are not observed there is chaos. Doctors operating in a hospital must follow certain procedures, that is, rituals, for the safety of their patients. All these rituals demand the use of bodily movement that symbolically articulates meaning in situations that are potentially capable of causing conflict or chaos.[8]

Functions of Ordering Rituals

Rituals do change in structure, in symbolic meaning, and in their social impact; new rituals can develop while older ones disappear. The following qualities of ordering rituals illustrate, however, that rituals do not change easily, sometimes for very good reasons.

1. Relieving anxieties

Ordering rituals are "defenses against anxieties"[9] through which we seek, establish, and preserve or celebrate order and unity for ourselves and society. Social life proceeds on a continuum between two possible imaginary opposing poles: absolute order and absolute spontaneity/chaos. There is an ongoing tension between these extremes with consequent uncertainty and fear, and that needs to be controlled in some recognizable action. The more tension there is in relationships, the more urgent it is to develop rituals that ease the anxieties.[10] When heads of state meet, considerable attention is given even to the smallest of details of diplomatic protocol for fear that a mistake will be interpreted as a slight to one or other of the national leaders. The very predictability and timelessness of ritual restore confidence in people that order can be established and maintained in a world of threatening chaos.

In other words, since social reality is too complex and ambiguous for the human person to deal with, there is an inborn desire to make it simpler and unequivocal, to build order where there is only the threatening uncertainty of chaos.[11] The more the uncertainty, the more urgent it is that the ritual be unequivocally clear. For example, when I want to

8. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 96–97.

9. See Isabel Menzies Lyth, *The Dynamics of the Social: Selected Essays* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), viii.

10. See Moore and Myerhoff, "Secular Ritual," 3–24.

11. See Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 120.

turn on a busy highway I must indicate without ambiguity that I am about to change direction. If I fail to do so I am endangering not just my own life but the lives of others.

Examples[12]

- Today when hospitals, schools, or churches close, or when there are liturgical changes, even if the reasons are sound, there are often vociferous protests from affected people. No amount of logical argument will convince them that the closures are in their best interests. One significant factor behind these outcries is the hidden function of these institutions: they ritually exist to contain people's fear of death. Their closure reminds people that death is a reality.

- Anton Obholzer[13] explains this further with reference to hospitals. He writes that in the unconscious part of our being we have no sense of health, but we have a concept of the chaos of death. In order to control our anxieties over death we repress them into the unconscious. Various defenses are used, including the formation of assorted rituals that safely contain our anxieties about the unknown. All cultures deal with the anxieties evoked by death.[14] In Christianity death is seen as a transition to a higher life in Christ (1 Cor 15:54-55) and Christian rituals express this. With the growth of secularism, however, this fear of death is allayed by the rituals of hospitals and medical staffs, the postmodern substitutes for the churches and their ministers. As Obholzer notes, "our health service might more accurately be called a 'keep-death-at-bay' service."[15] There is a popular fantasy that hospitals and their staffs will shield us from death.

12. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Healthcare Ministry: Refounding the Mission in Tumultuous Change* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 126–27.

13. See Anton Obholzer, "Managing Social Anxieties in Public Sector Organizations," in *The Unconscious at Work: Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services*, eds. Anton Obholzer and Verga Z. Roberts (London: Routledge, 1996), 171; see also Wilfred Bion, *Second Thoughts* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986), 199–231.

14. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Change, Grief and Renewal in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1991), 25–28.

15. Obholzer, "Managing Social Anxieties," 171.

They will find the right medical ritual to solve moral diseases and aging. If they do not, they have failed in their task.[16]

- Sometimes a decision is made to have "simple rituals" when in fact it is important to have rituals with a multiplicity of symbolism. Jimmy Carter, United States President 1977–1981, publicly declared that rituals surrounding the presidency would be simplified. Hence he walked back to the White House after his formal inauguration rather than using the traditional motorized cavalcade; gold braids were removed from the guards at the White House, and the usual ceremonies ceased to accompany a president's formal entrance. In his attempt to become "one of the people" he lost significant popular appeal and was perceived as "lacking in charisma, the sacred aura, that presidents should have."[17] This illustrates the importance of Victor Turner's definition of ritual, that is: "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers."[18] The United States as a nation, and the role of the president that represents it, is so complex that no technological language or purely intellectual statement by themselves can comprehend it. That is why the word "mystical" is used in the definition. The office of the president symbolizes the awe-inspiring quality of nationhood and the rituals surrounding it are holding back the anxieties of the people by reassuring them that all is well with the nation. To change these rituals arbitrarily is to unnecessarily evoke fear about the very stability of the nation.

2. Constraining behavior

One way to discover if an action is a ritual or not is to evaluate people's reactions to any attempt to change or ignore it. For example, if I refuse to obey a red traffic light it will not be long before I have an accident and/or the traffic police are at my door. The symbolism of the red light constrains me to act in a definite way. Again, if I fail to take a gift for a birthday party, people will at least nonverbally let me know that I have broken a ritual. Hence ritual can be defined as behavior "prescribed

16. Ibid.

17. David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 182–83.

18. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 19.

by society in which individuals have little choice about their actions."[19] Emile Durkheim in his major study *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) argues that the primary purpose of ritual is *always* to constrain the behavior of the group so that it remains a coherent whole. As this book shows, however, this reductionist approach is unacceptable. Rituals can in fact generate conflict. Moreover, many games and play have no other purpose but the enjoyment of the participants.[20]

3. Defining boundaries

Rituals define boundaries, classifying who belongs and who does not. For example, on the day I received my Australian passport the simple public ritual clearly defined that I now had rights and privileges that non-Australians do not have. People become aware of the realities of inclusion and exclusion through ritual. In the ritual granting me Australian citizenship I became acutely conscious of the fact that I was "in" and some people in the reception hall were not, that is, they were still beyond the boundaries of Australian citizenship. The symbolic articulation and affirmation of boundaries through rituals increases people's consciousness of their community. This may help to explain why political activists often rationalize fruitless demonstrations by arguing that they have at least raised the consciousness of their participants to their own identity in the midst of opposing forces.[21]

4. Incorporating contradictions

Ritual, like all symbols, has the ability to manage both sides of a contradiction simultaneously and to support and contain strong emotions. Contradictions, such as ideal/real, good/evil, life/death, joy/sorrow, confront us at every turn of our lives. A retirement ritual marks the sadness of ending a career, but it also celebrates the joy of leisure ahead, not bound by the rituals of daily working. A wedding ritual contains within it the emotions of loss and joy. At the same time parents are losing a son or daughter but are also gaining a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law. The ritual of the Eucharist simultaneously contains the symbolism of the death and resurrection of Christ.

19. Joy Hendry, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 75.

20. See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Elements in Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1950), 13.

21. See Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 50.

5. Articulating myths

Myths and narratives are two sides of the same coin (chap. 5). Narratives are also rituals because they make the mythic values of a culture concrete and experiential. Edmund Leach describes their interdependence in this way: "Myth . . . is the counterpart of ritual; myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth. . . . Myth regarded as a statement in words 'says' the same thing as ritual regarded as a statement in action."[22] But the interdependence is even more dynamic than what this statement describes. True, narrative rituals are the outward expression of myths, but they also reinforce the power of myths and even change them, depending on the circumstances.

Rituals of Male Sport

The fact that male sport as ritual has developed with considerable rapidity since the late nineteenth century may help to illustrate these points.[23] The mythology underpinning the ritual is that of modernity: competence, science, intelligence, achievement, profit, patriarchal power, aggression. Modernity exalts the power of the machine and financial investment for the sake of profit. In commercial male sport we find the human body envisioned as a finely tuned machine capable of bringing investors an increasing amount of money through gate takings and advertisements, but at the same time there is a glorification of the physically powerful male body so popular in ancient Greece. Gad Horowitz speaks of hypermasculinity to describe the growing aggressive power of the male in sport in contrast to the dramatic weakening of public interest in women's sport.[24] The degree of aggressiveness that is permitted, even encouraged, in many male sports is so startling that we can speak of rituals of violence.[25] In a sense, concludes researcher Varda Burstyn, male sport has become "a religion of domination

22. Edmund R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 13–14.

23. See Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 21–32.

24. See Gad Horozitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 53–123, 182–214.

25. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 113–14.

and aggression constructed around a male godhead."[26] The more the rituals of male sport are presented, the more their inherent mythology of male dominance is reinforced; they feed each other with ever-increasing energy.

6. Denying reality

Rituals can be used to articulate denial through reaffirming order and cohesion when chaos is threatening. I was once working with a religious congregational leadership team and encouraging them to identify obvious symptoms of congregational disintegration and demise. For two days I was puzzled that the team lacked energy, holding back from naming reality until the leader formally stated: "I think we are concentrating on the negative! Our task is to have hope and be positive. What we need is a new apostolic venture into a foreign culture. We have the personnel." Suddenly the energy of the team rose. All agreed with him, despite the fact that the reserves of qualified manpower would never be available to staff the new missionary project. His narrative was a ritual of denial reaffirming the fantasy that all was well. Neither he nor his team could face the fear-evoking reality of congregational death.

7. "Models for"/"models of"

The function of "models for" rituals is to impose, reaffirm, and strengthen public conformity to the status quo. In the 1930s Adolf Hitler, supported by his ritual experts, ruthlessly created and manipulated public Nazi rituals to express his distorted mythology of Germanic racial superiority. "Models of" rituals exist where consensus does not have to be imposed but needs to be reaffirmed. For Americans the flag is a powerful symbol of national identity and its raising carries considerable ritual importance, especially in times of national tragedy. Following the terrorist assaults on the United States in 2001, the whole country was aflutter with flags; huge ones decorated the damaged Pentagon and sports stadiums, tiny flags were attached even to baby carriages. Their display was a ritual of defiance and reaffirmation of identity signifying that Americans would not be coerced into submission.[27]

26. Burstyn, *The Rites*, 23.
27. See Arbuckle, *Violence*, 13–14.

8. Achieving manipulation

The world of advertising is filled with manipulative rituals. The presence of a beautiful woman in an advertisement for a new car is an attempt by the producers to make the particular car more attractive to male buyers. Politicians are also adept in manipulating rituals for their political advantage. A member of Congress, for example, will deliver a speech on the floor of the United States Senate or House of Representatives surrounded by the powerful symbols of this national political shrine. The videotape of the speech, however, is for voters in the home constituency; it does not show that there are rarely any other congressmen in the hall.[28]

9. Enforcing compliance

When people externally comply with the demands of ritual it does not automatically mean they accept all or any of the mythology that underpins it. For example, when people attend a funeral in a Catholic church they will be motivated by a variety of reasons. They may be there out of personal respect for the deceased or in a spirit of solidarity with particular relatives of the deceased. They may be present simply because their status in society demands it and it would be a social offense to be absent. Whether they believe in the ritual of the Mass is not the issue.

Transforming Rituals: Social Dramas

Ritual is not just about maintaining order in relationships, but more importantly, writes Victor Turner, it is a "patterned process in time,"[29] that is at the same time "transformative"[30] because society itself is a process, not something static. Society is being repeatedly recreated out of the struggles, the social dramas, to settle the tensions between structure and *communitas*. Structure connotes everything in society that identifies differences, constrains people's actions, and keeps them separated in orderly ways. *Communitas* or "anti-structure," on the other hand, refers to the recognition of people's common humanity; if this is not accepted there can be no society. These complex statements will now be explained.

28. See Kertzer, *Ritual*, 108, and Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 14–15.

29. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 95.

30. Ibid., 45.

Social Dramas

Turner calls the process of ritually recreating or transforming society[31] "social dramas." These range from the most extravagant ritual to quite commonplace exchanges such as a ritual of greeting or a smile. When a person greets another there is a built-in tension or uncertainty—will the person return the greeting or not? If the person positively responds, society is recreated; if the greeting is not returned there is a crisis in social relations. Reflecting on the dynamics of more significant social dramas, Turner notes that the normal pattern or order of society is temporarily suspended and the group is forced to reflect on its own behavior in the light of values inherent in their foundational myths or narratives, even if this means at times questioning the relevance of their values. The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, evoked a social drama in which Americans reflectively rediscovered the energy-creating significance of their national founding mythology. "In other words," Turner had written earlier, "dramas induce and contain reflexive processes and generate cultural frames in which flexibility can find a legitimate place."[32] Ronald Grimes, a specialist in ritual studies, emphasizes the importance of these insights about social drama: "Before Turner ritual was [treated by theorists as] static, structural, conservative. After Turner, it is imagined as flowing, processual, subversive."[33]

Stages of Social Dramas

Rituals of large-scale social dramas typically have four phases (Fig. 6.2), each of which has its own characteristics and time span: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration (or schism). A *breach* is a breakdown in social relationships. For example, when the Cold War developed between East and West after 1945 it destroyed the East-West alliance that had existed during the years of the Second World War. More recently there was the breach between the Western nations and Russia as a consequence of Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008; this followed a period of cooperative relations after the breakup of the former Soviet Union.

31. The transformative nature of ritual is more fully explained in the author's book, *Laughing with God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 42–90.

32. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 92.

33. Ronald Grimes, "Reinventing Ritual," *Soundings* 75 (1992), 22.

A *crisis* is an event resulting from a breach that cannot be ignored; the Berlin blockade by the Soviets was such an occurrence; another was the threat by Russia to place missiles aimed at the West as a consequence of the West's reactions to the Russian invasion of Georgia. The crisis phase is "usually one of these turning points or moments of danger and suspense when a true state of affairs is revealed, when illusions are dispelled and masks torn off or made impossible to don."[34] Factions or alliances develop to press for this or that strategy to resolve the crisis—some for the return to what was lost, others for a new set of relationships. If the phase continues, people are forced to take yet stronger stands based on what they perceive to be moral principles inherent in their mythologies. A war of words can develop.

The third phase, *redressive action*, is often a lengthy and complicated process. The crisis produces a feeling of chaos, senselessness, or meaninglessness. This can be a most terrifying experience. People feel the need to discover meaning in what is happening, and so they are forced to reflect on fundamental myths that could guide them to resolution of the crisis. In this period of *reflexivity* there is a struggle to resolve the crisis through particular rituals, for example, recourse to informal arbitration, the law courts, revolution, and war. People generally experience considerable pain or emotional turmoil in this phase if their reflection is genuine. They are angered at what has happened, but the more they reflect on their mythological values, the more they discover that they cannot take refuge in past achievements or ignore the crisis.

The fourth phase, called *reintegration*, is characterized by the parties either resolving their differences with even a heightened sense of unity or breaking apart into *schism*. The Berlin blockade was overcome when the allies, led by the United States, after vocally resisting the Soviets, further reflected on the implications of their commitment to the mythology of democracy. Loyalty to the principles inherent in this mythology led to the concerted and successful creative effort to break the blockade. Conciliation with the Soviets did not eventuate, but instead a more deeply rooted schism between the East and West quickly developed.

34. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 215.

Life as a Social Drama

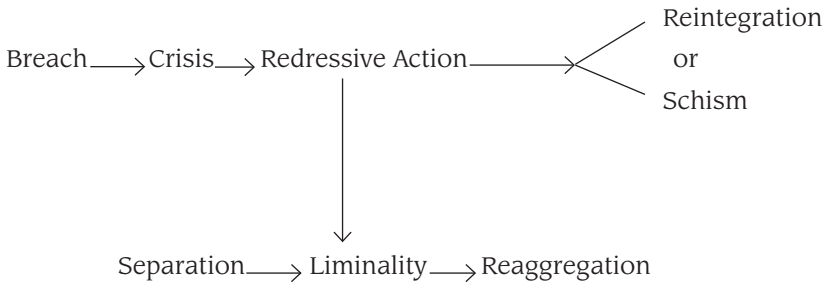

Figure 6.2

Redressive Action: Tripartite Stages

Turner concentrates his ritual analysis particularly on the tripartite stages of the third phase of social dramas, namely *redressive* action, as these stages are to be found in all kinds of human interactions. First there is the *separation* stage, in which people are symbolically reminded that they are about to break with the routine of everyday life with its predictable patterns of hierarchical roles and status (called *societas*). The second stage is *liminality*. Ideally this is the time during which people relate to fellow ritual participants and/or to deity/spirits in, at least symbolically, an undifferentiated ecstatic or shocked oneness that Turner calls *communitas*.

Examples

In July 1985 the pop musician Bob Geldof organized the Live-Aid concert in London to raise concern for poverty-stricken sections of the world and millions were able to participate through satellite television. Geldof described the spontaneous *communitas* scene in the London park: "There was a tremendous feeling of oneness on that stage. There had been no bitching, no displays of temperament all day. . . . Cynicism and greed and selfishness had been eliminated for a moment. . . . A lot of people had rediscovered something in themselves."[35] The shocked reaction of millions

35. Bob Geldof, *Is That It?* (London: Penguin, 1986), 310.

of people following the terrorist attacks in New York is another example. Class, racial, and religious distinctions ceased to have any significance. This period of often intense reflexivity can be a time of surprising personal and social creativity. As Geldof says, people are able to rediscover "something in themselves" through their reflections on their founding myths.

If in the liminality stage participants interiorize, or are reconverted to, their mythology, they feel the urge in passing out of liminality to recreate or transform the world. The status quo in which key societal values have been compromised will no longer be tolerated and this illustrates the potential power inherent in mythology and rituals. Mythologies that underpin rituals can help cultures to maintain stability in times of calm, but alternatively they can be subversively applied to new questions and issues in times of crisis, leading to new and creative responses. As Turner writes: "Ritual is a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural processes."[36]

The liminality stage has such potential to subvert the status quo that individuals, organizations, and governments may deliberately erase it from rituals of social drama. For example, Charles Jackson, in reflecting on contemporary funeral customs in Western cultures, concludes that the denial of death "has become an art form and . . . dying is [presented] as an alien unnatural humiliation."[37] And Philippe Aries writes: "It is above all essential that society . . . notice to the least possible degree that death has occurred. . . . If a ceremony still marks the departure, it must remain discreet and must avoid emotion."[38] In terms of Turner's social drama model these Western rituals of death acknowledge the breach and crisis stages, but lightly trip over or ignore the reflexive phase. That is, the separation and liminality stages of the ritual process are skillfully avoided. The whole range of grief reactions among the bereaved—pining, numbness, anger, despair, guilt, questions about one's own mortality—are to be ignored. The cultural imperative is: reintegrate bereaved individuals and friends as fast as possible into life as though nothing has happened.

36. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 171.

37. Charles Jackson, in idem, ed., *Passing: The Vision of Death in America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 242.

38. Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 90.

Another example, already referred to in the previous chapter, comes from dictatorial governments. The South African government under apartheid tried to prevent public funerals of dissidents for fear that people would use these rituals as the opportunity to question the status quo. Likewise the Chinese government effectively prevented public mourning for the students who had been killed in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

In the third stage, the rites of *reaggregation*, participants move back into the world of hierarchical status and roles (*societas*). This is a dangerous stage.[39] Douglas observes that on entering the reaggregation stage participants are "charged with power, hot, dangerous, requiring insulation and a time for cooling down."[40] They are so enthused by their transformative experience that they may want to change the world immediately. When confronted by the harsh realities of the status quo awaiting them, however, they can become so cynical that all attempts to be proactive are abandoned. I once observed a group of middle-level business managers who had been away in a rural conference center for a weekend's planning session. It had been a liminal experience for them. They had returned to their offices highly energized to transform their company into a dynamic operation, but a week later their passion had evaporated under a barrage of cynical comments from their superiors.

The following two case studies illustrate the tripartite stages of the redressive action phase of social dramas.

Case Study: Entertainment as Social Drama

By the mid-1990s Ireland as a nation was in a liminal stage of a national social drama. It was in the midst of an economic boom of such proportions that it became appropriately known as the Celtic Tiger. Ireland's traditional mythology included the realities of its chronic poverty and the tragedy of centuries of having to export its youth to seek employment overseas. Now Ireland had become both rich and a vibrant part of the global economy, necessitating for the first time the recruitment of workers from all over the world. What was to be its national mythology now? A creative, artistic narrative helped Irish people and outsiders answer this question. In 1994 a short, brilliantly presented performance, officially called *Riverdance*, won a Europe-wide television

39. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Change, Grief and Renewal in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1991), 32–37.

40. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 117.

contest. Audiences in Ireland and internationally were captivated by its professionalism and relevance.[41] In a relatively short liminal space of time Ireland had embraced the postmodern mythology of a global economy resulting even in the commercialization of its entertainment industry. The secret of the show's success was its ability to name in ritual narrative form the radical mythological changes in the Irish nation.

Riverdance was advertised as a contemporary expression of the story of Ireland and its people, "a transformative moment in representations of Irishness and Irish dance."[42] Observers saw the show not just as a radical break with the way Irishness had been traditionally depicted, but as "an internationalized Irishness, an identity forged between the 'local' and the 'global' that reverberates with both past and contemporary dance forms."[43] It incorporated new and contemporary forms of dance such as Spanish flamenco, ballet, high leaps and jumps, and exaggerated horizontal actions across the stage. In addition, contrary to tradition, there was a tendency to sexualize particularly the female body in the performance. A further example of the ritual adaptation of Irish dancing to contemporary life was the remarkable use of technology. Small microphones had been inserted into the dancing shoes of the lead performers to ensure audiences in large halls would hear their hard shoe taps, a key quality of the production. The global aspects were significant. Prior to *Riverdance,* Irish dancing and music had been presented very much as leisure activities, but *Riverdance's* purpose now became financial profit as well as the expression of the new Ireland.

Case Study: Ritual Facilitates Mythological Change

This case study from Fiji illustrates that in the ritual of a social drama a mythological change can occur while its external expression remains unaltered. S*evusevu*, that is, the ceremonial presentation of kava, a mildly narcotic drink, is a pivotal ritual for all indigenous Fijians. The belief is that the age-old ritual must remain unchanged to ensure the stability and safety of the relationship between the supernatural and human society. The formal speeches at the liminal stage of the ritual reaffirm that Fijians live like a loving family and are always obedient to men of traditional rank and power. In a study done of the ritual in a rural village,

41. See Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 92–103.

42. Ibid., 96.

43. Ibid., 95.

however, it was found that a significant shift in the mythology underpinning the ritual had occurred among its villagers there.[44] Villagers now feel threatened by three forces: the development of urban life among former villagers with its commercialism and individualism; the individualism and concern for making money of the different ethnic Indo-Fijians, who are descendants of immigrants from India in the nineteenth century and who live close by; and international tourists who come to see them participate in *sevusevu*.

Given these external pressures, villagers seek to bolster their self-image through *sevusevu.* In the ritual they claim that, *uniquely* in Fiji, they choose to forsake wealth in favor of better things such as loving each other, worshiping God, and serving the community. They are not like money-grabbing Indo-Fijians, international tourists, and their own Fijian cousins in the cities. During the *sevusevu* ritual they testify that they alone are loyal to traditional Fijian values. The reality is quite different. Villagers complain that there is much backbiting and suspicion, even accusations of sorcery, and dissatisfaction with traditional leaders among themselves, but this glaring contradiction between the ideal and reality does not bother them. The primary mythological emphasis now behind the ritual is no longer on traditional values but on their special identity as villagers within Fiji. They alone among all Fijians are protecting the culture in the face of disturbing internal and international forces.

Theological Reflection

In our postmodern world we are accustomed to seeing entire landscapes being destroyed and redeveloped over a short time. We can assume that the same destruction and growth can occur within cultures, that people's symbolic landscapes can be destroyed, the familiar sights, sounds, and routines in which people are nurtured can be obliterated overnight without particularly negative results for them. This is simply not so. Symbols, myths, and rituals are not replaced as quickly as buildings or landscapes or mass-produced as neatly as automobiles or toothbrushes. The uprooting of the inner framework of cultures, even when there is conscious and intellectual assent to what is happening, destroys the stable sense of belonging and people's individuality. All kinds of

44. See Karen J. Brison, "Constructing Identity through Ceremonial Language in Rural Fiji," *Ethnology: An International Journal of Cultural and Social Anthropology* 40 (2001): 309–27.

negative reactions can result. The reform of Roman Catholic worship was rightly mandated in 1963 by Vatican II and dramatic changes were initiated immediately. But there was little or no feeling for the complexity and dynamics of rituals, and serious mistakes were made. For example, churches were speedily redesigned, altar rails were withdrawn and statues destroyed, leaving people confused and angry.[45] Theologians and liturgists would do well to ponder the lessons of the following insensitive ritual change.

In a brief statement the Catholic bishops of England and Wales simply cancelled the ritual requiring Catholics not to eat meat on Fridays, as a small weekly mortification in memory of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. The bishops exhorted Catholics to choose some personal act of sacrifice instead. Theoretically it was a good idea, but the bishops failed to realize that symbols and rituals have a multiplicity of meanings and are always adding more, while the external ritual remains the same. Migrant Irish laborers, alone and living in an atmosphere of cultural and religious prejudice, looked to rituals that would give them a sense of religious, personal, and cultural identity. Abstaining from meat on Fridays had become one of these rituals. But suddenly this ritual was destroyed and the immigrants, as well as many local Catholics, felt betrayed and confused. If the bishops had realized this they would have proceeded to initiate the change with far more cultural sensitivity and pastoral formation.[46]

45. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 42–43.

46. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 37–53.

Chapter 7

Cultures as Multicultural Processes

> Contrary to all those who think that the time to speak of multiculturalism is over, I think it is most timely and necessary, and that we need more not less.
>
> —Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism* [1]

> [The] problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of ethnic differences, as these conspire with complex differences in color, gender, and class . . .
>
> —Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose Canons* [2]

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the meaning of the terms "multicultural" and "multiculturalism," not an easy task. Multiculturalism, for example, has become "a buzzword with almost as many meanings as there are mouths to utter it."[3] One reason for the confusion surrounding the meaning of the words is the assumption that they refer *exclusively* to ethnic groups. In fact, the terms can be used in one of two ways: broadly, to embrace all kinds of national subcultures, such as youth subcultures, and narrowly, and more commonly, to refer to ethnic groups. In this chapter two social categories, namely subcultures and ethnic groups, will first be explained. Only then will it be possible to explain the terms "multicultural" and "multiculturalism" with greater precision and with particular reference to ethnic groups.

1. Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 14.

2. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xii.

3. Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 111.

Subcultures

The term *subculture*, which refers to cultural patterns that make some segment of society's population symbolically distinct, is applied very widely to social groups including immigrant, ethnic, gender, and sexual groups.

> Definition
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> A subculture is a method of defining and honoring the particular design and identity of different interests of a group of people within a larger collectivity. Thus subcultures consist of people, in tight or loosely connected groupings, who:
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> - share some common interests, values, tastes, and often specialist knowledge and linguistic jargon;
> - adhere to the same rituals and pastimes to some degree or other;
> - express their unity in some distinctive symbols such as dress; and
> - may be known through an association with a particular geographical region.

The term is a particularly postmodern one, for it is a reminder that cultures are not homogeneous, but highly fragmented. Contemporary societies contain an ever-increasing diversity of subcultures, especially in densely populated urban environments—for example, trade unions, business clubs, youth groups, homeless people, jazz musicians, yuppies, campus poets, skateboarders, football fans, Punks, Hell's Angels, hip-hop, or rap.[4]

In every subculture there is always an element, sometimes strongly evident, of protest against the dominant culture of which it is part. The more people of the subculture feel threatened by the dominant group, the stronger and more vivid will be their symbols of protest and resistance. For example, the Catholic Church in the United States prior to Vatican II was the best organized and most powerful of the nation's subcultures. The more Catholics felt intimidated by prejudice and discrimination against them, the more they developed their own symbols of identity such as their own schools and hospitals.

4. See Peter Brooker, *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London: Arnold, 1999), 208–9.

Sometimes the term *counterculture* is used to refer to a subculture in which people not only strongly protest against conventional ideas or behavior but are able to give an intellectual justification for their position. An example would be the youth-oriented counterculture of the 1960s that rejected the cultural mainstream as excessively competitive, self-centered, and materialistic. Also, hippies and other groups emphasized a cooperative lifestyle in which "being" and the capacity for personal growth ("expanded consciousness") became more important than "doing" or the possession of material goods.[5]

Youth Subcultures

Characteristics

Youth subcultures tend to function as loose-knit *scenes* rather than as formally structured organizations,[6] and membership is generally temporary, but some groups, for example biker gangs, are able to maintain the allegiance of their followers well into adulthood. These subcultures began to appear in countries with market economies around the mid-1950s as the gap between school and employment widened, thus delaying the need for students to face their responsibilities as adults.[7] Youth subcultures are especially rich in distinctive symbols and rituals against the adult world such as dress, hairstyles, and music.

The protest quality of youth subcultures against the adult world, as articulated in their symbols of identity, can at times be especially harsh. For example, the Beatles could attack the rigidity of school structures in their lyric "Getting Better" of 1967: "The teachers that taught me weren't cool—You're holding me down, turning me round—Filling me up with your rules." With their British working-class background and their creative musical professionalism the Beatles were well equipped to articulate anti-class sentiments in highly expressive rituals. Punks show their disdain for accepted middle-class standards with the juxtaposition of safety pins, bin liners, gaudy colors, and spiked hair. They believe that music should be as raucous and unsophisticated as possible, both to

5. See John J. Macionis and Ken Plummer, *Sociology: A Global Introduction* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1997), 112–13; Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 5–26.

6. See Stephen Castles, *Ethnicity and Globalization* (London: Sage, 2000), 161.

7. See Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo, and Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15-25-Year-Olds* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 4.

annoy conventional society and to show that no one needs to be excluded from playing it. Biker gangs use the hated symbols of Nazi swastikas and army helmets.

Types of Subcultures

A whole range of types exists, sometimes closely connected to class structures, for example, the soccer tribes of Britain, which are directly linked to their working-class roots.[8] Skinheads first appeared in the late 1960s as a reaction to ethnic immigration and the growing acceptance of the gay culture, and punks in the late 1970s as a response to unemployment. The hip-hop or rap music subculture emerged in the 1970s from young African-Americans living in the slums of New York and then expanded nationally and internationally. It reflects a long history of black segregation and socioeconomic deprivation and is characterized by breakdancing, graffiti, particular dress styles, and a unique musical type.[9]

In more recent times researchers have identified four new youth subcultures noted particularly for their loose and flexible boundaries: the "Boomer Generation" (members born 1946–63), "Generation X" (born 1964–81), "Generation Y" (born 1982 onward), and "Net Geners" (born between 1978 and 1994).

- The Boomer youth subcultures, disillusioned with traditional institutions and authority structures, including the churches, are optimistic and idealistic about life, politically active, expecting immediate personal satisfaction.[10]
- Generation X subcultures are noted for their pessimism, viewing the Boomer subcultures as self-centered, fickle, and impractical. They are angry because they have been left with the social problems created by their predecessors: racial strife, homelessness, AIDS, fractured families, and government deficits. They yearn for a new spiritual eclecticism, respect for the environment, and tolerance between cultures.

8. See Gary Armstrong, *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 156–74.

9. See Gelder, *Subcultures*, 114–21.

10. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 157–62; Rebecca Huntley, *The World According to Y* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2006), 1–23; Peter Sheahan, *Generation Y* (Prahran: Hardie Grant Books, 2005), 2–105.

- Generation Y subcultures seemed to exemplify the early optimism, ambition, confidence, passion, and idealism of the Boomer years, but among them the latest communication technology such as computers, e-mailing, text-messaging, are taken for granted, linking them immediately with any part of the world. Theirs is a hybrid cultural world embracing influences simultaneously at the local and global levels, so much so that some theorists have called the subculture "glocalization."[11]
- Sociologist Don Tapscott has identified in his research on people born between 1978 and 1994 a new youth subcultural movement, the Net Geners, in which the qualities of Generation Y are more visibly and intensely present.[12] Members are smarter, faster, and more tolerant of diversity than their predecessors. They care strongly about social justice and are actively trying to improve society according to their lights; their role in the recent election of Barack Obama as president of the United States testifies to this. They value freedom and choice in all they do, scrutinize everything, and demand integrity and openness, including their ability to decide what to buy and where to work. They expect collaboration, and that everything will happen fast and with constant creative action.

Tapscott concludes that the Internet is producing an improved, more collaborative version of family life he calls the "open family." Parents increasingly acknowledge that young people have digital expertise they need but do not have. They also advocate that the most effective way to avoid misuse of the Internet by their children is to win their children's trust through honest conversation. Among the negative qualities of Net Geners is their disregard for personal privacy. For example, the posting of photographs of alcohol-fueled parties on the Internet, descriptions of drug use and other intimate matters is already causing an increasing number to fail job applications as employers are able to access this data.

11. See Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 45–50.

12. See Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009).

Understanding Ethnicity

Ethnic Groups

> Definition
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> Milton Yinger defines an ethnic group as "a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients."[13] That is, an ethnic group is defined as a gathering of people within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a focus on one or more social markers, especially physical qualities such as skin pigmentation, particular customs, language, religion.

Ethnicity connotes individuals' sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Of course people will differ in their degree of commitment to an ethnic group; for some the links will be tenuous, for others strong. The intensity of ethnic identity is generally dependent on the attitudes of the dominant host group toward outsiders in their midst. If the outsiders approximate the culture of the host group, their own ethnic identity will slowly weaken, as is the case for Anglo-Saxon immigrants in United States or Britain. Negative reactions to outsiders by the dominant group intensify the outsiders' ethnic internal bonding, as is the case among contemporary Mexican Americans. This will be more fully explained later.

Qualities

There are several key qualities of an ethnic group. The most basic is *difference*, that is, people perceive themselves or are viewed by others as different. Historically, the tendency has been to assume that social markers were determined by the physical qualities of people. Thus the word "race" was applied to separate ethnic groups, but in recent years the term "ethnic group" has become preferable to counteract the implied or overt racism in the use of the word "race." The second quality is *memory*. Ultimately,

13. Milton Yinger, *Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict?* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 3.

people feel they are different from other groups because of their origins, whether this is true or not.[14] Third, there is a *relational* quality, that is, an ethnic group is a subdivision of a larger cultural whole. For this reason it is impossible to consider an ethnic group separated from other groups or "at home" in a mainly monocultural state or society; for example, Koreans are not an ethnic group in Korea.

Types

Two types of ethnicity can be identified: involuntary (or ascribed) and voluntary.

1. Involuntary ethnicity

Involuntary ethnicity occurs when ethnic identity is imposed on a group of people from outside. There is little or no escape from this oppressive labeling; the us/them dichotomy that is always present in ethnic relations is especially strong. The dominant group ("us"), often out of fear of losing its position of power, pejoratively stereotypes the marginalized group ("them"). The oppression is institutionalized so that in key areas of life such as employment, housing, education, and social relations, people who are oppressed are excluded from equality with the dominant group. To develop and legitimize this discrimination, the in-group may brand the out-group as racially or culturally inferior. Such has been the fate of African-Americans, American Indians, black and colored people in South Africa under apartheid, Jews in Nazi Germany, and immigrants particularly from Muslim countries in contemporary Germany, Switzerland, and France.

Sometimes the confusing term *minority* is applied to an ethnic group, with the purpose of highlighting the subordinate or marginal nature of the group in relationship to the dominant political power. The ethnic group may in fact be numerically as large as, or larger than, the group with the political power; such was the case with the black population in South Africa and with Catholics in Northern Ireland.

People who are trapped in involuntary ethnicity have few choices about how they can define their identity. Their demands for equality of opportunity may lead them to seek radical forms of political self-determination as happened, for example, in the breakup of Yugoslavia into

14. See Jack D. Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 12–16.

the violently opposed nationalistic states of Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia. In 1974 one Maori civil rights leader in New Zealand, protesting against institutional racism, vividly described his experience to me in this way:

> For over a hundred years we indigenous people have been told our way of life is inferior to [that of] the white settlers from Europe. Look at what has happened. We do the manual work in this country because we are told we are capable of little else. Now we demand the world recognize that we have a culture born of the struggle to survive through the centuries. Without it we are nothing, not human. The more we tell our own story, the more we feel stronger inside to stand on our own feet and demand respect. The more self-esteem we have, the more we feel we can give something of our uniqueness to others. We demand, and are getting at last, a say in the power institutions of this country. For too long we have had to depend on the good will of the whites to give us justice. No more. Many Anglo-Saxons in this country don't like it. Hard luck on them!

This comment illustrates two important practical axioms:

- Only from a position of cultural identity can a people move out with dignity and self-confidence to share with other cultures. The more people have the chance to articulate and share their stories, the more energy they will have to challenge the dominant power structures.
- Only if ethnic groups have access to power structures of a society such as political, economic, and educational institutions will the achievement of full ethnic self-confidence be possible.

Within the United States in the 1960s and 1970s these two axioms inspired protest movements among African-Americans. Negative stereotypes of inferiority had to be cast aside for blacks to elevate their sense of self-worth after two centuries of struggling to survive in a racist society. Hence the invention of the narrative "black is beautiful," the coining of the term "African-American" to indicate pride in cultural roots, the calls for controversial Black Studies programs within universities[15] and for affirmative action. Some African-Americans, convinced that the dominant political system could not be justly changed in their favor, preached separatism. For example, the leaders of the Black Muslims, calling for "freedom from contempt," planned for separate hospitals, schools,

15. See Gates, *Loose Canons*, 87–104.

industries, shops, but their ultimate goal was the granting of one whole American state for blacks alone.

Dangers of Ethnic Labeling

Here are some pastoral warnings:

- Ethnic groups, like cultures, must not be thought of as discrete, frozen in time, resistant to external influences, homogeneous, and without any internal conflict. That is, it is incorrect to consider ethnic groups as wholly resistant to other identities.[16]
- Members of ethnic groups must not be defined only by their origins and assumed to be behaviorally determined by them. Individuals in ethnic groups will have many identities, drawing on their ethnicity when occasions demand or require it.
- Not all members of ethnic groups and cultures share some unchanging essential characteristics. In fact, every ethnic group is a hybrid construction[17] from a wide variety of sources; an ethnic group is best thought of as a social process, with moving boundaries and identities that people collectively and individually draw around themselves in their social lives.
- Ethnic groups, in fact any social group, must never be reified as if they were inanimate things. Reification is "apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things . . . as if they were something other than human products—such as facts of nature."[18]

2. Voluntary ethnicity

Shortly after African-Americans in the United States began to demand respect for their history and origins, there developed what can be variously termed voluntary, symbolic, defensive, or backlash ethnicity among whites. Protests of self-righteous indignation still continue, especially as economic conditions worsen and the competition for employment intensifies. As a consequence of this defensive pluralism there are demands

16. Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 119; also see Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity, Racism, Class and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 10–27.

17. See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 59–83.

18. See Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 106.

for university programs in such areas as Irish, Jewish, and Polish studies. Similar but weaker reactionary movements exist in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and Canada, whose governments have been fostering affirmative action programs for minorities. A Sydney taxi driver, talking about New Zealand immigrants to Australia, bitterly complained to me: "These spongers are taking our jobs. We are Australians and we are different from these lazy immigrants!" Logical or rational arguments do little to counteract such expressions of defensive ethnicity.

In summary, voluntary ethnicity means that, as a reaction to the growing identity demands by underprivileged ethnic groups, people feel the need to redefine themselves more precisely by asserting their own ancestral self-worth and their right to maintain their power position in society. This voluntary ethnicity of whites of European ancestry does not restrict their choice of a spouse, suburb, or friends, or affect their access to employment and political opportunities. But the socioeconomic and political consequences of being Asian, Hispanic, or black are real and frequently hurtful, obstructive, and unjust. These people are not free to choose their ethnic identity; its crippling boundaries are defined for them on the basis of skin pigmentation.

Multiculturalism and Ethnicity

Historical Background

Most governments that acknowledge ethnic diversity in their midst refer to their countries as "multicultural" societies and their official policies fostering respect for this diversity are designated "multiculturalism." That is, multiculturalism is a social doctrine that is a positive substitute for programs of assimilation; it recognizes the citizenship rights and cultural identities of ethnic minority groups and, more generally, it is the public endorsement of the value of cultural diversity.[19]

The term "multiculturalism" in particular now evokes strong emotional reactions among its supporters and detractors due in part to the failure to develop an agreed, precise meaning. For many conservatives the term has come to signify a very disruptive, unsettling, and dangerous force. For them diversity of cultures is something to be tolerated at best.

19. See Will Kymlycka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

Peace and order, they claim, existed in the past and will continue to exist only when a dominant group has insisted on conformity to their own monocultural ethos. Extreme liberals, for their part, also dislike the term. They claim that it implies either a bland "melting pot" or an assimilationist attitude that would remove all differences, or a situation in which cultural diversity is so emphasized that any unity between cultures does not or cannot exist.[20]

Multiculturalism has never been accepted in the United States and Europe to the extent that it has been in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and to some degree in the United Kingdom. Sharp rises in immigration, the increasing fears of terrorist attacks by radical groups, and the growing tensions between Muslim minorities and dominant cultures that in recent times followed the terrorist offensives in the United States, Britain, and Spain, have moved the public discourse from multiculturalism to euphemisms of "cohesion" and "integration." In the 1990s, even before the terrorist assaults, there was generally a growing backlash against multiculturalism, even in countries where it has become an official government policy. In Australia, once considered "a laboratory for multiculturalism,"[21] under a Liberal/National Coalition government a vigorous political reaction has developed against the multicultural experiments. It has been the same in Canada. In Britain the head of the Commission for Racial Equality stated in 2004 that the country needs to discard its emphasis on recognizing cultural differences characteristic of multicultural education programs and accept instead a narrative of national culture. The leader of the Conservative opposition in Britain, David Cameron, declared in 2007 that the "creed of multiculturalism" had contributed to a "deliberate weakening of our collective identity."[22]

In the United States the political backlash against multiculturalism has expressed itself in a variety of ways; the growing antagonism toward equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups is a pertinent example.[23] And racism still lurks behind the rhetoric. When Republican politician Patrick Buchanan implored his audiences to "take back our cities . . .

20. Henry A. Giroux, "Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy," in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David T. Goldberg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 336.

21. J. J. Smolicz, "Australia: From Migrant Country to Multicultural Nation," *International Migration Review* 31 (1997): 171.

22. David Cameron, *The Economist* (16 June 2007), 58.

23. See Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2–3, 151–56.

take back our culture and take back our country," the "our" in question signified the white population.[24] In the opening pages of Allan Bloom's monoculturalist *The Closing of the American Mind*, the author portrays the development of a Black Studies program at Cornell University as if Western civilization had just been destroyed by the Vandals.[25] Ultimately a major cause of the backlash against multiculturalism is the fear in the traditional holders of power that they will have to share their power with others. These power holders, while admitting other people are different, treat them with disdain, as deviations from their own "perfect culture," as people to be stigmatized.

Cultural Diversity Remains

Throughout modern history people have dreamed that ethnicity and nationalism would cease to exist. This fantasy reached new heights during the 1950s, when it was widely thought that the process of modernization would inevitably lead to the decline of intercultural differences and bitterness. Behind this dream was the Enlightenment vision of a common human civilization. Since the 1960s, however, the dramatic renaissance of ethnic diversity and the negative reactions it is evoking has destroyed this unreal dream.

Cultural diversity and its implications for governments, churches, and other organizations cannot be swept under the rug. There is an increasing desire for differences to be respected, especially by those with limited or no access to power. To counter the dominance of European cultural patterns, some supporters of multiculturalism are calling for Afrocentrism or Asiacentrism, that is, the dominance of African or Asian cultural patterns. They see this as a corrective for centuries of minimizing or altogether ignoring the cultural achievements of African or Asian societies. Many new immigrants in the United States are now rejecting the former melting-pot vision of the hundred percent American, but many more are refusing the idea of the hyphenated American, such as Chinese-American. Instead, they are defining themselves by transnational identities such as American *and* Chinese, American *and* Korean. Some want to obtain dual citizenship. Given the ease of travel and Internet

24. Patrick Buchanan, cited by Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism* (Buckingham: Open University, 1997), 219.

25. See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 27–43.

communication, many more remain actively involved, socially, politically, and economically, in their countries of origin.[26]

Dominant and Ethnic Groups: Power Relationships

Dominant groups that control economic, political, social, or religious power structures in society can relate to subcultures in one of two ways: *either* by oppressing them, for example, persecution of gay people in Muslim countries, the Falun Gong and Tibetan people in China; *or* by beginning a process of sharing power. This latter is an example of reciprocal power as described in chapter 3. Though this section will focus on the relations between dominant groups and ethnic subcultures (see Figure 7.1),[27] the theory can be applied to subcultures in general.

1. Power Held by Dominant Group

Annihilation or Oppression

People of dominant cultures who refuse to share power with minority groups react in one of several ways: by policies of annihilation, coercive pluralism, or assimilation. Examples of annihilation are the British relating to Aborigines in Tasmania, the Dutch to blacks in South Africa in the nineteenth century, the Nazis to Jews.

Assimilation

During the nineteenth century and well past the 1950s the melting pot metaphor was the most powerful characterization of ethnic relations in the United States. It was assumed that all immigrants must be thrown into the mainstream of American life, without concessions or supports, in order to pool their characteristics and develop a new amalgam or American culture. The reality was very different. No one was particularly interested in the customs and values of socioeconomically poor migrants. They were pressured for the sake of survival to adopt as quickly as possible the existing hegemonic Protestant Anglo-Saxon white culture. Many did not succeed and joined the ranks of those trapped in chronic poverty.

26. See Peter Kivisto, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 82.

27. See David Bennett, "Introduction," in *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity,* ed. idem, 1–25 (London: Routledge, 1998).

A similar policy, variously called Anglo-Saxon conformism or Anglicization, characterized other English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

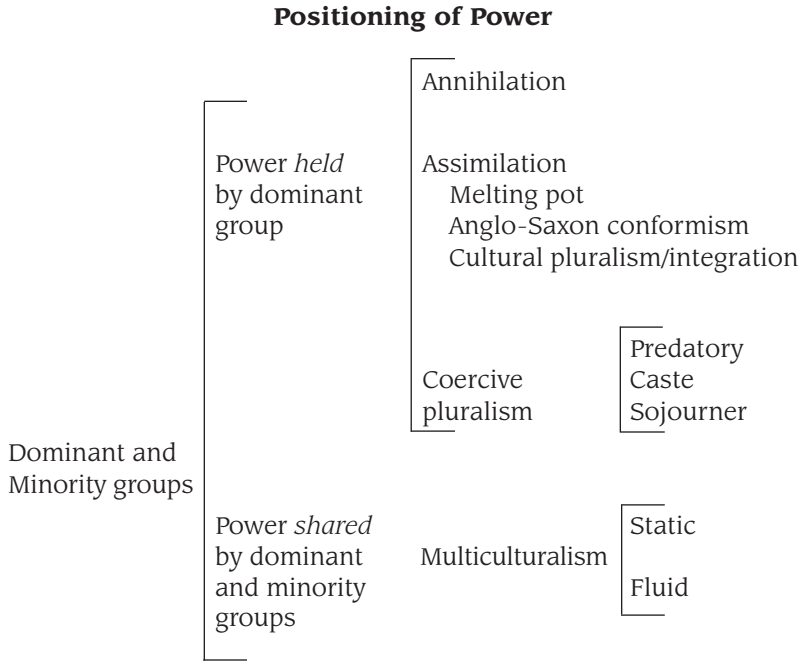

Figure 7.1

Cultural Pluralism/Integration

As the assimilative policies in several English-speaking countries in the 1960s were not having the desired effects, a new approach called *cultural pluralism* (sometimes referred to as *integration*) became popular especially in the educational field. Core values of the dominant culture were to be acquired, but ethnic subcultures could preserve values and customs, provided these did not interfere with the dominant group's core values. In Australia, for example, the policy in 1975 meant that "immigrants would be expected to agree publicly that all things Australian are best, to be greatly interested in sport and not to work too hard, and in return they would not be badgered if they privately practiced their

native culture."[28] A similar dynamic began to develop in other countries like Britain. In the United States the civil rights and countercultural movements signaled a shift from the prevailing assimilative governmental policies. At heart this policy of toleration of nonessential customs was merely an attempt to make cultural assimilation efforts a little less nasty or disruptive for migrants. The long-term aim remained the same, namely: ethnic minorities are encouraged to adopt all aspects of the dominant way of life.

Coercive Pluralism

Some immigrant groups were considered "unmeltable" in the United States, and this was determined by definitions of race and religion. For example, Irish people, along with southern and eastern Europeans, tended to be portrayed in racial and religious terms and did not fit the category worthy and capable of assimilation.[29]

Lawrence Fuchs, when reviewing the history of policies in United States toward all "unmeltable" peoples, whether indigenous, involuntary migrants such as slaves, or immigrants from other countries, distinguishes three categories under the general title of "coercive pluralism," namely predatory, caste, and sojourner policies.[30] Indian tribes were considered to be "predatory," outsiders to be pushed aside because they obstructed European settlers. "Caste" policies refer to the slave trade and the subsequent history of prejudice and discrimination against African-Americans. "Sojourner" policies describe the government's relations to people such as Mexicans and Chinese in the nineteenth century, and later Latino and Asian groups. They were considered to be temporary residents providing cheap labor; they were given little or no legal protection. Even today millions of illegal migrant workers come within this category: they are people who exist to provide inexpensive labor and who are to be discarded in times of economic recession.

28. Martin Kovacs and Allan Cropley, *Immigrants and Society: Alienation and Assimilation* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 123.

29. See Peter Kivisto, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 43–52.

30. See Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and Civic Culture* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), 80–127.

2. Power Sharing

Multiculturalism

In the 1970s this emphasis on the intolerance of ethnic groups began to be increasingly challenged. By the 1990s the United Nations, particularly under the influence of the governments of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand,[31] rejected assimilationism and cultural pluralism for indigenous peoples in favor of multiculturalism. In a dramatic turnaround these three countries, unlike the United States, deliberately aimed to implement multiculturalism as a formal policy in which ethnic group rights were to be publicly promoted, though the implications of this policy often remained unclear.[32] As far back as 1971 Canada was declared a multicultural and bilingual country by the then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau: "Every ethnic group has the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values. . . . A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians."[33]

Many European countries, especially Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, began to follow suit: immigrants should be able to retain their distinctive cultures while they adapt to working and living in their new countries. Some assimilation would take place, but it should not be made compulsory. France has stubbornly continued to resist adopting multicultural policies. The melting-pot ideology has not as yet been seriously challenged from within, but the reality of poverty especially among immigrants, particularly Muslims, and their dissatisfaction with national monoculturalism will eventually force the French government to face the situation.

Definition of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a social system that claims to offer freedom of choice to those who desire to be culturally different in one or several

31. See Catherine J. Iorns Magallanes, "International Human Rights and their Impact on Domestic Law on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand," *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand*, ed. Paul Havemann, 235–76 (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1999).

32. See Peter Kivisto, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 84–115; Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945–1975* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 1–191.

33. Pierre E. Trudeau, quoted by John W. Friesen, *When Cultures Clash: Case Studies in Multiculturalism* (Calgary: Detselig, 1985),1.

aspects, for example, religious or political beliefs, occupation, styles of living, and ethnic identity. The model aims to remove the pressures that prevent subcultures like ethnic groups from using their cultural roots to develop their personalities and sense of group belonging. Bhikhu Parekh, an authority on multiculturalism, provides this working definition; although it focuses on ethnic groups it is increasingly being extended to apply to any subgroup in society:

> Multiculturalism does not simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing and encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace. At the same time it means creating a public space in which these communities are able to interact, enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which they recognize reflections of their own identity.[34]

This definition, therefore, embraces the following assumptions:

- Culture is to be understood in the postmodern sense (chap. 1), that is, no cultures are static, but all are *fluid*, and the boundaries of every culture are porous and open to change; members of subcultures differ in their commitment to values and openness to change.
- It rejects two popular classifications of multiculturalism: *demographic* and *holistic*. The former connotes that a particular society merely contains different cultural groups; the second means that a society values cultural diversity but gives higher priority to group-wide cohesion.
- It accepts the social philosophy of *political* multiculturalism that acknowledges the legitimate interests of subcultural groups within a society or an organization. Adequate politico-economic and educational structures must permit minority peoples *by right* to be fully involved in decision-making in matters that affect their lives.
- Multiculturalism is about sharing power, that is, in the process of negotiating a balance between cohesion and diversity members of traditional dominant power groups must be prepared also to make significant adjustments.
- Only from a position of cultural strength will members of ethnic groups be able to move out to contact other cultures with a sense

34. Bhikhu Parekh, cited in Goldberg, *Multiculturalism*, 335.

of self-respect and confidence. This is impossible as long as labeled groups of people suffer from poor housing, education, health services, and racial discrimination. Hence the need for much-maligned affirmative action programs that assume that merely removing legal obstacles to participation in decision-making is not sufficient to alter the behavior of the privileged majority or of the excluded minorities themselves; habits and attitudes encouraged by centuries of discrimination are not readily changed, even among people of goodwill.

- Through the process of power sharing, the dominant culture itself will be undergoing change, losing its overriding influence as a more overall hybrid culture slowly continues to emerge.

Political Multiculturalism: Problems

Given that the theory of multiculturalism is still developing, it is understandable that mistakes continue to occur in its implementation. Here are some problems that have emerged:

Dialogue denied

If there is no power sharing there is no multiculturalism. In Britain, for example, the electoral process has provided ethnic groups with very little ability to be involved in making decisions in matters that deeply affect their lives. They must rely on the goodwill of the dominant white group to eliminate institutional prejudice and discrimination, to guarantee legal and civil rights, and to obliterate poverty. Moreover, there is no way of ensuring that this goodwill will be developed and maintained.

Culture misunderstood

A mistaken understanding of a culture or ethnic group has led to unfortunate policies by political multiculturalists. As already explained, a culture or ethnic group must not be defined as a homogeneous and cohesive entity frozen in time. Rather, it is a fragmented process with members at different levels of commitment and with several other sources of identity at the same time, such as gender, employment, recreation, and religion, all of which can powerfully affect the identity of individuals. There must be the freedom to choose whatever custom individuals feel is appropriate for them. They must not be forced to adorn themselves with an ethnic brand if they freely choose not to. The image given by tourist agents of indigenous Fijians is of smiling people, "always happy." In fact, em-

ployees at tourist centers have had to be "taught to smile in a Fijian way" in order to accommodate the tourists' image of Fijians. A serious deficiency of multicultural education in British schools has been the failure to avoid stereotypical images of unified and integrated minority cultures. Educationalists should rather have stressed the reality that all cultures are hybrid, constantly changing and experiencing internal divisions.[35]

Oppression reinforced

Governments can be blind to the injustices within migrant ethnic groups themselves, such as oppressive caste and class structures, and their failure to act can reinforce these forms of internal domination.[36] The government in British Columbia was accused in 2006 of ignoring traditional violence within the large Indo-Canadian population. Earlier there had been an acrimonious debate in Ontario over whether Muslims could use Islamic *sharia* courts to settle family disputes; the government finally decided against it. In Canada and elsewhere the practice of female circumcision and the custom of arranged marriages, with little or no consultation with the brides-to-be, are causing disquiet.

To prevent chaos, and this applies especially to multicultural countries, every national culture must at a minimum foster a unified identity by encouraging a sense of transcendence and worth among its members. That is, every government must cooperatively develop a persuasive and authentic unifying mythology for belief and action. Governments are now beginning to confront the fact that some ethnic groups and immigrants are refusing to respect some mainstream values of democracy, such as gender equality.[37] Getting the balance right between subcultures and a unifying mythology is not an easy task.[38] Sometimes governments overdo the requirements of uniformity to national values. Such has been the case in France, where female Muslim pupils were refused permission to wear traditional headdress to school. The government claimed religious particularism in schools threatens the secular rationality of education.[39]

35. See Hewitt, *White Backlash,* 126.

36. See Pariminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 13–16.

37. See *The Economist* (18 November 2006), 47.

38. For an analysis of the complex interaction between principles of political multiculturalism in Western democracies and the religious expectations of Islamic immigrants, see Geoffrey B. Levey and Tariq Modood, *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

39. See Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 207.

Second generation issues

Second-generation migrants may experience considerable difficulties in their adjustment to the host cultures. They must inhabit two cultural worlds at the same time: that of the school or the workplace, where they feel alienated, and that of the home, where they are thought by their parents to be abandoning the traditions of their ancestors. It is a dualism filled with tensions. The more parents insist on family traditions the more the migrant children feel alienated from the society they wish to adjust to, but that keeps refusing to accept them. Parents and children can be unable to communicate easily with each other simply because they no longer share a common language. Parents have been too busy working to learn the new language well, and the young, desperate to belong to their new cultural world, are often uninterested in learning the language of their parents. Young people may live in a kind of cultural "no-person's-land." Jawaharlal Nehru, first prime minister of India, describes how he experienced similar tensions of identity in his own life as he was educated away from the traditions of his country of origin: "I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. . . . I am a stranger and an alien in the West. I cannot be of it. . . . But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile's feelings."[40]

This helps to explain why young second-generation migrants may try to escape these identity tensions by joining gangs or organizations that are often anti-host society. For example, some young Muslims born in Britain and responsible for the suicide bombings in London in 2005 had bonded with the so-called "world Muslim nation" or *ummah*, which they felt was being persistently and unjustly harassed by Western governments. In these groupings they were able to find a much-needed sense of identity and support they could not find in Britain, their home.

Theological Reflection

Vatican II stated that "in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the

40. Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted by David Wilson, *Asia Awakes: A Continent in Transition* (New York: NAL, 1970), 56.

qualities and talents of the various races and nations."[41] The words "races" and "nations" are to be translated as "cultures" (see chap. 9). In this same document, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the council proceeds to list several levels of liturgical adaptation that are permissible in local cultures. This raises critically important pastoral questions such as:

> What is the culture of a particular country?
>
> Is it a culture oppressing subcultures within its boundaries?
>
> What if there are many subcultures or ethnic groups within the one parish?
>
> How is it possible to avoid domination by one or more ethnic groups during liturgical adaptation?
>
> How are both the unity of the parish and its diversity to be honored?
>
> Are pastors and teachers portraying minority cultures stereotypically as neat, unified wholes?
>
> How is the postmodern understanding of culture, with its fluidity, openness, and fragmentation, to be respected and welcomed while maintaining reverence for tradition?[42]

Unless the first principle of multiculturalism is rigorously adhered to, namely, that appropriate structures must be established to permit ongoing dialogue to occur between the parties concerned, there can be no answers to these questions.

Saint Paul fought hard in defense of ethnic rights at the Council of Jerusalem for this type of dialogue and succeeded, but he also defended the need for people to act for the wider common good: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). When faced with this challenge, the pastoral team of a parish in New Zealand established a process of dialogue with representatives of thirty-six ethnic groups in their parish. As a result of the dialogue it was agreed that two complementary liturgical liminal spaces should be respected: private and public. In the private space people have the right to celebrate events such as weddings, funerals, and family rituals that respect their cultural

41. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), 37, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin P. Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello, 1975).

42. See Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 213–78.

diversity, but in the public space, for example at Sunday Eucharists, no sole ethnic group is to dominate, for it is here that the different ethnic groups are to celebrate their oneness in Christ: "But now that faith has come . . . you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3:25-26).[43]

43. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Laughing with God: Culture, Humor, and Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 143.

Chapter 8

Cultures as Patterns of Religious Symbols

> For communication about religion to take place, the structure of the symbols must be able to express something relevant to the social order.
>
> —Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*[1]

> Conventional, mainline religious groups may have fallen on hard times, but the curtain has yet to fall on faith, spirituality, and the quest for transcendence.
>
> —David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*[2]

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to explain that all religions, whatever their beliefs about the supernatural, are visibly expressed in cultural forms and, second, to identify four cultural models of Catholicism; particular attention will be given to the impact of postmodernity on Catholics.

Religion is extremely difficult to define; as with the word "culture" there are countless definitions of religion, with no agreement on one universal definition. Religion is like St. Augustine's comment on time: "If you do not ask me what time is, I know; if you ask me, I do not know."[3] Postmodernist Zygmunt Bauman is equally at a loss: "'Religion' belongs to the family of curious and often embarrassing concepts, which

1. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 38.

2. David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 137.

3. St. Augustine, cited by James C. Livingston, *An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 4.

one perfectly understands until one wants to define them."[4] Edward Tyler in the nineteenth century defined religion as "the belief in spiritual beings,"[5] but this is unsatisfactory as there are people whose apparently dedicated religious activities involve no spiritual beings. Buddhists are concerned, for example, with attaining a state beyond the spiritual, a state that does not require the intervention of a god or gods. A few years after Tyler, Emile Durkheim considered religion to be a kind of collective action in which society celebrates its own cohesive transcendent power over its individuals. But the purpose of religion is far more than just providing social cohesion.[6] As explained in the previous chapter, religious rituals can in fact create divisions and conflict.

Pierre Bourdieu: Religion

Bourdieu, an influential sociological theorist, concentrates on what he calls the "symbolic violence" of religion. For example, it is an act of symbolic violence to assert and inculcate into a people's vision of the world ("habitus," as it is termed by Bourdieu) that riches, not poverty, are a unique sign of God's love. The primary function of religion is then the legitimizing of the resulting social inequalities. For him it is the imposing of arbitrary forms and systems of meanings on people by the dominant powers in cultures so that the dominated do not recognize what is happening. The status quo is assumed to be normal and God-given and not to be questioned.[7]

Definition

The most influential contemporary definition among anthropologists is that provided by Clifford Geertz, who takes a phenomenological or experiential approach:

> A religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [*sic*] by

4. Zygmunt Bauman, "Postmodern Religion?" in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Paul Heelas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 55.

5. Edward Tyler, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2 (New York: Torchbook, 1891), 8.

6. Emile Durkheim's approach to religion is found in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965).

7. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5, 14, 210.

> formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[8]

This definition contains no judgment about the existence or otherwise of the supernatural, because that is outside the scope of the social sciences. Religion defines in symbolic or mythological terms (see chap. 2) the nature and purpose of the world (what Geertz calls "models *of*") and how we are to relate appropriately to it by way of feeling and acting ("models *for*"). Symbols of any religion show that "a group's ethos" is able to be "rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life adapted to the actual state of affairs."[9] Both the nature of the world and human emotions and motives are mutually confirmed and reinforced.[10]

Example

Using Gertz's definition of religion, Mark S. Massa explains why Senator Joseph McCarthy's anticommunist crusade in the 1950s was able to receive significant support among many Catholic Americans. As they watched with fear and sadness the persecution of millions of ethnic Catholics in Eastern Europe and the seeming loss of nerve by the American government to do something about this, they passionately (but wrongly) felt that their church's own consistent anticommunist stand made sound political sense. That is, their interpretation of their religion "rendered intellectually reasonable" McCarthy's strident political campaign.[11]

Three important conclusions follow from this definition of religion.

- Religions are not something purely otherworldly, because they are encased in cultures of their own making. Religions have their own cultures, influence other cultures, and are influenced by them.

8. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

9. Ibid., 89.

10. For a further explanation of the importance of Geertz's definition of religion see Carl F. Starkloff, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 70–81; Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (1983): 237–59.

11. See Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 62–65, 79–80.

Recall, for example, that the Catholic Church following the Peace of Constantine in the fourth century uncritically embraced the power structures and trappings of the imperial court.

- A religious culture must be able to respond to people's needs; otherwise it becomes irrelevant, a museum piece.[12] The Christian faith "must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each culture . . . and this must be done in a vital way, in depth and right to the culture's roots."[13]
- Since all cultures are inherently conservative and resistant to change, religious cultures are slow to be proactive when confronted with people's changing needs. They continue to address problems of the past or apply old, unworkable responses to contemporary issues. The consequence of this social drama is that either the religious cultures die or new movements emerge from within or from outside.

Catholicity: Culture Models[14]

The following are four culture models of Roman Catholicism. A model aims to illuminate complex social reality by highlighting emphases and downplaying details or nuances. Nuanced explanations of details are omitted to allow us to grasp a little more clearly what is in fact a highly complex situation. Any particular culture is then compared with the model to examine the extent to which it resembles that culture. In the application of models, however, the following cautionary comments are necessary. In a particular society it is possible for all the models to be observable at the same time, with one model being more influential than the others. Models, however, give the impression that cultures are static, their boundaries frozen, and that all within a particular culture are equally committed to its characteristics. Previous chapters show this is not the case. Cultures are not homogeneous (chap. 1); there are constant movements and tensions within all cultures. And within a short space of time a person or group may draw on one model and then on another, depending on the situation. For example, a person may opt for religious practices that

12. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 38.

13. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 55.

14. These models draw on the insights of Mary Douglas as explained in chap. 3 and my publication *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 80–97.

characterize premodern cultures one minute and then in the next minute commit to attitudes and behaviors that are postmodern.

Premodern Model

Premodern religious cultures consist of two levels: official, and unofficial or popular religiosity. At the official level the religion is rigidly hierarchical, patriarchal, rules of behavior are extremely detailed, and unchanging boundaries are firmly set and policed. As Mary Douglas has explained, the more a culture is threatened by dangerous alien forces the more it demands vigilance in guarding its boundaries. Orthodoxy must be maintained even in small matters. Dissenters who dare to question the status quo are polluters of "pure doctrines" and must be severely punished, even if the requirements of natural justice are broken in so doing. Dissenters are treated more severely than those beyond the cultural body because the maintenance of orthodoxy is more important than individual rights. At the unofficial level of premodern religious cultures people feel intimidated by evil spirits and manipulative sorcerers who need to be controlled through appropriate rituals. They feel the need to express their relationship to the deity and the spirits in very concrete ways and symbols, often accompanied by colorful dancing and music. Feeling or imagination is dominant, not rationality or intellectual analysis.

The culture of the official institution of the Catholic Church, especially from the Reformation to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), is an example of this premodern type. The church is a rigidly hierarchical and orderly system, patriarchal, with God the Father a distant and fear-evoking figure who is intimately concerned about even the smallest infraction of the religion's rules. Jesus Christ restrains the Father from punishing people, but the Father's role as the final judge of humankind remains in the forefront. Between this distant God and the people there are approachable saints who act as intermediaries and protectors. Liturgies are formal and under the direction of priests, with minimal, if any, direct participation by laity. As the world is evil and in danger of invading the church, those who question the theological and hierarchical status quo must be identified and marginalized. The image of the church is that of a fortress, powerfully protecting the faithful from the dangers of a threatening world.

At the unofficial level of the church, popular religiosity flourishes. "Popular religiosity" refers to beliefs and practices relating to supernatural or superempirical beings or powers that exist *independently* of, or are not officially sanctioned by, ecclesiastical authorities. Since people

have recognized the need for all sorts of mediators or agents to intercede for them in a threatening world, it is not surprising that all kinds of devotions to Our Lady and the saints are so important in popular religiosity.[15] It is called *popular* because it is thought that this form of religion belongs to the "masses" or working class only, as opposed to the educated elite. But these descriptions are too restrictive. People of all classes may be deeply imbued with this form of religion. Individuals can be highly analytical in their social and business life but at the same time devoted to popular religiosity. Church officials, however, frequently disparage popular religiosity and seek either to destroy or domesticate it, often without success. The Latin American episcopate is more positive in its approach. The Latin American bishops write that at "its core the religiosity of the people is a storehouse of values that offers the answers of Christian wisdom to the great questions of life. . . . It creatively combines the divine and the human, Christ and Mary, spirit and body, communion and institution . . . intelligence and emotion."[16] John Paul II also spoke positively of the importance of popular religiosity for Catholics of all social and economic statuses in the United States in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, 1999.[17]

Modern Model

This religious type mirrors the wider culture of modernity with its sturdy commitment to values of egalitarianism, individualism, rationalism, utilitarianism, and competitiveness. In a culture of modernity people have a weak sense of belonging or obligations to the group. Individuals form alliances with one another to provide better opportunities for competitive success, but such bondings are very fragile since they are held together only by the self-interest of the individuals themselves. They break apart once more profitable interrelationships appear.

15. See descriptions by Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and *Popular Catholicism in a World Church*, ed. Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

16. "Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, Puebla," in *Puebla and Beyond*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 184–85.

17. See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (22 January 1999), 16.

After the successive impacts of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church withdrew into a citadel-like culture and appeared to remain untouched by modernity. However, the church as an institution was deeply but indirectly affected by modernity's emphasis on rationality and order. It encouraged a theology, condensed into orderly theological manuals far removed from the world of experience and feeling, in order to defend itself against the logical and rational arguments of Protestants. Scripture was used primarily to support preset theological positions.[18] Following Vatican II and the breakdown of the premodern structures of the church, Catholics in general became exposed to the full force of modernity and its values. Whenever this secular culture model is uncritically interiorized, Catholics accept only those beliefs and practices that do not conflict with the mainstream values of the secular culture, manipulating the church to fit their personal aspirations. For them the church has become just another organization to be evaluated not in faith but by the requirements of utilitarian individualism.

Postmodern Model

Among the characteristics of postmodernity are: the refusal to consider that positivist and rationalist measures are the only criteria for knowledge (chap. 1); a readiness to use symbols from unrelated or eclectic sources; a ready openness to rejoice in spontaneity, superficiality, differences, and playfulness;[19] the centrality of chaos rather than order; a ready distrust of any myths or narratives that claim to have universal validity as opposed to individual and group narratives as the sources of different, even competing, identities; and cynicism toward traditional institutions such as the mainline churches and governments.[20] These qualities of postmodernity are profoundly affecting religious cultures in general. Among the distinguishing qualities of postmodern Christianity are the following:

- The importance of experience rather than faith.[21] If God is "experienced" in prayer, this is an assurance that whatever is said in the

18. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 119–24.

19. See James A. Beckford, "Religion, Modernity and Post-modernity," in *Religion: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Bryan Wilson (London: Bellew, 1992), 19.

20. See Arbuckle, *Violence*, 153–214.

21. See Paul Goodliff, *Care in a Confused Climate* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1998), 194–95.

Scriptures and by charismatic leaders is correct. Charismatics and Pentecostalists exemplify this approach. Major problems confronting society are ignored.

- Heaven is of little concern. People desire immediate solutions to their personal problems such as good health and wealth, hence the increasing emphasis on holistic healing such as New Age therapy remedies, and on the interconnectedness of the human/ecosystem.
- As a reaction to the scientific and materialist emphases of modernity there is a yearning for a spirituality, but there is often a vagueness about what it means.
- There is a remarkable eclecticism, a veritable spiritual supermarket in contemporary spirituality, with people drawing symbols and rituals from all kinds of sources,[22] failing to realize that they may conflict with Christian beliefs.[23]

Case Study: Catholicism and Postmodernity

The combined effects of the theological and cultural changes of Vatican II and the expressive revolution of the 1960s that significantly inspired the development of postmodernity have left Catholics breathless, lost in what seems to be an ever-increasing malaise. People feel stunned, overwhelmed with the speed of many social changes. They become exposed to movements and pressures they cannot understand. In an effort to restore order in the chaos there are fundamentalist movements, contrary to the vision of Vatican II, to return the church to its premodern mythology and authority structures.[24] Self-righteously, using their powers of surveillance, fundamentalists in the church identify anything they consider unorthodox and then harshly discipline the wayward. They assume that history must be put right and the church rescued from the "dangerous modernists" and returned to its "golden pre-Vatican II era."[25] They are highly selective about what is at the heart of the church's teaching, conveniently overlooking the social documents and concentrating instead on issues of lesser importance,

22. See Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber, 1969).

23. See Beckford, *Religion*, 11–23.

24. See Arbuckle, *Violence*, 203–14.

25. See comments by Patrick M. Arnold, "The Rise of Catholic Fundamentalism," *America* 156, no. 14 (11 April 1987): 298–302.

for example liturgical rubrics and matters of private sexuality.[26] At times Catholic fundamentalists are estimable leaders in the anti-abortion campaign, but wider issues of social justice are overlooked.

Fundamentalist movements, for example Communione e Liberazione, Neo-Catechumenate, Opus Dei, and Catholics United for the Faith, actively look to Rome to use its coercive power "to put the church right." Theologian Joe Holland prophetically commented in 1990 that the "new wave of postmodern lay communities are tempted to pursue a cultural strategy of classical restoration, rather than a postmodern regeneration." This strategy would "restore exclusively the classical transcendent and hierarchical disclosure of the masculine face of God." There would be an attempt "to reassert patriarchy as an authoritarian means of combating the disintegrating crisis of late modern culture." This approach to society would be done "predominantly in fear and resentment rather than in compassion and healing."[27] Time has proved Holland's analysis correct. Rome not only supports many of these fundamentalist-oriented organizations but itself appoints people such as anti-council bishops who then initiate movements with fundamentalist qualities. The overture of reconciliation in 2009 toward the four excommunicated schismatic Lefebvrist bishops, while a paternal act of mercy, is sending profoundly disturbing messages to the wider church. These bishops, publicly rejecting much of Vatican II, claim they have been seeking the lifting of the excommunication in order to work within the church for the restoration of a preconciliar style of Catholicism.[28] The fact that one of the four bishops has publicly questioned whether six million Jews died in the Holocaust has further fueled concern in the wider church.

On the other hand, many older Catholics, thoroughly educated in the council's theology of church and lay involvement, now view these restorationist movements with immense sadness and alarm. While Rome speaks of the need for dialogue and justice in the world, they see it as discouraging any reasonable critique of its

26. See Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church,* 53.

27. Joe Holland, "The Postmodern Cultural Transition: Its Challenge to the 'Vowed Life,'" Draft Background Paper to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, USA (8 August 1990), 21.

28. See editorial "Not Yet Back in the Fold," *The Tablet* (31 January 2009): 2.

own structures, including its secretive methods of governing.[29] They search for priests and parishes that can speak to their needs according to the vision of the council. Others, feeling that the church no longer speaks to the realities of their daily lives, choose to walk away saddened and cynical or to join other religious groups.

Richard Gaillardetz, reflecting on the emergence of a new cultural type of lay Catholic in recent years, "the under-forty Catholics," describes their significant qualities.[30] They have a consumerist approach to their faith, choosing those beliefs and practices they feel make sense to them, but their commitment to the church as such is weak. He terms another type "Evangelical Catholicism," whose members earnestly search for a renewed sense of Catholic identity. They are quintessentially postmodern because they seek to construct from their own convictions a distinctive religious identity in a world of pluralist beliefs. This leads them to choose a variety of identity markers such as the Eucharist, Mary, the pope, and pre-Vatican II liturgical styles and dress. Not interested in critiquing the church's governing structures and authority, they lack the concern of Vatican II to enter into dialogue with the world or to be involved in social justice programs.

Case Study: Anglicanism and Postmodernity

The Anglican Communion also exemplifies many of the contradictory characteristics of contemporary postmodern religious groups: fragmentation, passionate exuberance, feeling over reason, fundamentalism. Anglicans traditionally emphasize a theological harmony between commitment to the Scriptures, tradition, and reason. But now the Communion is in danger of splitting because of two irreconcilable, different theological views concerning the nature and purpose of the church in the world. The evangelical fundamentalist wing of the church, which holds the Scriptures rather than tradition and reason as the foundation of their beliefs, claims that the world is inherently evil and the biggest threat to the church is secular humanism, which includes, for example, homo-

29. See Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 16.

30. See Richard Gaillardetz, "Apologetics, Evangelization and Ecumenism Today," *Origins* 35 (19 May 2005): 9–15.

sexual freedom and women priests. On the other hand, liberal theologians hold that secularism is not an obstacle to the faith, for God is working within the secular world. They claim that God loves minorities, and the church should not judge or exclude them; hence their support for women priests and gay rights. Very vicious verbal infighting continues between the two sides, with the evangelicals acting with the unrestrained verbal ferocity of fundamentalists demanding that they impose on the whole Anglican Church a uniformity of doctrine and practice.[31] At the same time the liberals are struggling to prevent this from happening.[32]

Prophetic Model

This type of religious culture tends to emerge in reaction to authoritarian hierarchical forms of religion, often under the inspiration of a charismatic person or persons. Relationships are strongly egalitarian and the image of the church is that of a pilgrim people journeying with Christ: brother, healer, savior. As many religious congregations in their initial founding exemplify this type, they help to explain the qualities and power of this model.

For example, St. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–547), founder of the Benedictine monastic movement, reacted prophetically to the feudal structures within the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his time. In opposition to the individualism, materialism, and authoritarian abuse of power of these institutions, Benedict offered an alternative vision of society founded on the kingdom values of interdependence, love, and justice. The abbot's task was to be persuasive, not coercive. Not only was he to be elected by all the monks, he was to make important decisions only after listening to all members of the community. Special consideration was to be given to younger members because, says the rule, "the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger. . . . If less important business in the monastery is to be transacted, [the Abbot] shall take counsel with the seniors only."[33]

31. See Monica Furlong, *C of E: The State It's In* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), 334–35; Chris McGillion, *The Chosen Ones: The Politics of Salvation in the Anglican Church* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 178–87.

32. See Peter Herriot, *Religious Fundamentalism and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 85–86.

33. *RB: The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Terence Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 179–80.

Music historian John Shepherd argues that Gregorian chant as encouraged by the early Benedictine monasteries is itself prophetically countercultural in reaction to the hierarchical feudal structures within church and society. The pentatonicism of the chant was based on a nonhierarchical collection of tones in which there was no principal or root tone.[34]

A similar prophetic movement emerged under the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226). He was shocked by the wealth and misuse of power within existing orders and the church in general. The poverty of Francis was not primarily personally ascetic; rather, it was to be prophetic and christological. As Christ had freely chosen poverty, thus revealing his humility, so also should Franciscans rejoice when they live among people considered of little worth such as the poor and powerless, the sick and lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.[35]

The model is helpful in understanding the rise and inner dynamics of prophetic groupings such as women's movements for equality of rights within the church, "churches from below," prayer groups, L'Arche communities, and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Bishop Francisco Claver, SJ, defines a BEC as "A community of believers at the grassroots level, which meets regularly under the leadership of a lay minister, to express their faith in common worship, to discern on their common living of the faith, to plan and act on common decisions regarding their life of faith in community, as community."[36]

Normally "churches from below" develop in reaction to the perceived poverty of Gospel values in society and/or the church. For many intentional communities, especially BECs, God in Christ is portrayed as a brother and a liberator, the one with whom the oppressed of this world can identify.[37] Theology becomes a "theology from below"—the result of people's reflection on their own narratives of life and experience in the light of the Gospel. Liturgies are participative, simple, and mirror the living faith experience of the members and the model of the church as a pilgrim in this world, a model so central to the theology of Vatican II. Every member has a particular role within the group; clerics are not

34. See John Shepherd, *Music as Social Text* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Philip Smith and Alexander Riley, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 150.

35. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding Religious Life Formation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 13–21.

36. Francisco F. Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 89.

37. See Aloysius Pieris, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?" *The Month* (September 1985): 231–39.

singled out for special status or influence beyond what their sacramental duties require of them.[38]

Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and Postmodernity

Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity worldwide have grown dramatically since the 1960s. In the southern hemisphere alone, by 2050 only one in five Christians will be non-Latino and white, as increasing numbers of Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans leave historically mainline Christian churches for the more recently introduced Pentecostal denominations.[39] From a total population in Latin America of 520 million, an estimated 170 million call themselves Pentecostals, charismatics, or members of independent, usually Pentecostal churches; 36 percent of Chileans belong to Pentecostal churches.[40] In Guatemala almost a third of the population is Pentecostal; in Brazil there are an estimated 24 million followers. Conversions continue with significant speed, mainly among people who are poor, but they are now spreading among the middle classes. Some now call this a new Protestant Reformation as the cultural monopoly of Catholicism continues to be weakened.[41] In Africa Pentecostalism is spreading twice as fast as Catholicism and shows three times the growth of other forms of Protestantism.[42] The impact of Pentecostalism among Hispanics in the United States is also increasingly significant. For example, though it is estimated that 68 percent of Hispanics are still Catholic, conversion to Pentecostal forms of religion continues to gather momentum.[43]

The zeal and courage with which converts witness to their faith[44] must raise serious questions for the mainline churches, and in particular

38. See Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 90–93.

39. See Karen J. Brison, "The Empire Strikes Back: Pentecostalism in Fiji, *Ethnology* 46 (2007): 21.

40. See Ondina E. Gonzalez and Justo L. Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 271–96.

41. See Bernice Martin, "From Pre- to Postmodernity in Latin America: the Case of Pentecostalism," in *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, ed. David Martin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 106–9.

42. See John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 217.

43. See "Latinos and Religion: Separated Brothers," *The Economist* (31 July 2009): 31.

44. See Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity*, 274.

the Catholic Church. These churches are obviously not responding to the deepest desires of these converts. They are seen to be irrelevant.

Sociologist Bernice Martin offers reasons for the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in South America. The speedy transition from economic and social premodernity to capitalistic individualistic postmodernity is taking place in Latin America, for the most part without having to pass through the stage of modernity. Contemporary Pentecostalism, she claims, has become a significant vehicle for this process, not traditional Catholicism. There is a massive migration of the desperately poor from the rural areas to the cities in search of a new life, but they lack the traditional kin, class, and clientage support systems. Women are most vulnerable, for they have always suffered from the irresponsible *machismo* of their menfolk, domestic violence, alcoholism, and prostitution. The Catholic Church has preached against this for generations, recommending to women patience and recourse to Our Lady for consolation, but the problems have intensified in the massive slums of the megacities. Pentecostalism, on the other hand, promises to restore a moral order in the relationships between women and men and is having very visible success. It also preaches individual prosperity, if people but believe. Failure to move ahead in a capitalistic system is blamed on lack of faith and on bad spirits.

Case Study: The "Toronto Blessing"

The "Toronto Blessing" is an expression invented to describe the revival and subsequent phenomenon that began in 1994 at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Christian Fellowship (TACF), a Pentecostal church in Toronto, Canada. The *Toronto Star* described a session involving 5,300 people. Participants "collapsed, some rigid . . . some convulsed in hysterical laughter . . . [and] grunts so deep women recalled the sounds of childhood, while men adopted the very position of childbirth."[45] In her sociological analysis of TACF, Margaret Poloma argues that this revivalist movement is a reaction to the emotional sterility, materialism, and scientism of modernity. It provides a holistic view of the person: an integration of body,

45. Cited by Margaret M. Poloma, "The 'Toronto Blessing' in Postmodern Society: Manifestations, Metaphor and Myth," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron Klaus and Douglas Petersen (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 364.

cognition, emotions, will, and spirit that has been destroyed by the consequences of the Enlightenment. It offers, she concludes, "a creative response to both the straight-jacket of modernism and the abyss of postmodernism."[46]

Martin identifies several weaknesses in the dominant Catholic Church that Pentecostalism has taken advantage of, namely, the traditional alliance of the church with the ruling elites, reliance on foreign priests, and the church's discouragement of popular religiosity following Vatican II. For the Latin American church the cultic trappings of popular religiosity together with the baroque untidiness of churches offended "the educated international opinion-formers of Catholicism as being in dubious aesthetic taste and obsolete theological fashion."[47] This over-intellectualized Catholicism has offended many of the poor, who found the plain washed church interiors, the weakening of pious respect for Mary, the expulsion of the colorful devotions and healing practices and the removal of the statues of their favorite saints too much to accept. Pentecostalism's approach is built on this denigrated traditional popular religiosity, especially its emphasis on healing and liveliness in worship, making people once more feel at home. Its democratic structure also allows people to feel they are actively participating without the controlling presence of the clergy. If a particular pastor becomes authoritarian, people can move away and establish their own worshiping group.

In summary, the secret of Pentecostalism's expanding success as a postmodern movement is:

- It has the ability to offer people *immediate* hope that there are solutions to their problems within the intense chaos of urban poverty; if there is no success they can blame the devil or their own lack of faith in the Spirit. Wealth is a sign of God's blessings. As one observer notes: "[Pentecostalism] doesn't oppose consumerism. It embraces it. It *imports meaning* into consumerism."[48]
- William Hewitt believes that among the reasons for liberation theology's lack of attractiveness in contrast to the success of Pentecostalism is its excessive intellectualism and its emphasis on distant

46. Ibid., 382.

47. Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 124–25.

48. Margaret Simons, *Now Faith, Money, Power: What the Religious Revival Means for Politics* (Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2007), 97. Italics in original.

goals.[49] It is the immediate promise of material achieve-ment through individual effort and the neglect of the group that highlights the postmodern quality of Pentecostalism. Liberation theology, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that poverty cannot just be removed by individual enthusiasm and effort; structural change is also required. Without this structural change only a small minority can break through the barriers of poverty. Pentecostalists rarely challenge the injustices of national and global capitalism and for this reason, unlike liberation theologians, they are very acceptable to governments eagerly committed to economic rationalism.[50]

- Pentecostalism responds to individuals' yearning to tell and retell their personal story of salvation and their hopes for freedom from poverty and its associated evils. It is not based on rationalization and bureaucracy but on story, song, gesture and empowerment, enthusiastic release, and personal discipline.[51] Individuals no longer feel they are the passive receivers of complex theological or dogmatic narratives so characteristic of their experience of traditional Catholicism.[52]
- Although the new Protestantism insists that the man is the head of the family, and that women must obey their husbands, it also calls for men radically to change their aberrant immoral ways. In consequence, the double standard of sexual morality is theoretically abolished, resulting in mutual and equal responsibility between women and men.[53]

Theological Reflection

A positive quality of postmodernity is that chaos, not order, is at the very heart of the universe. And one of the most powerful images used

49. See William E. Hewitt, *Base Communities and Social Change in Brazil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

50. See Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 183. For an example of uncritical support for the capitalist system in Australia by a Pentecostal Church see Margaret Simons, *Now Faith*, 55–97.

51. David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 142.

52. See Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 147–52.

53. See Martin, *On Secularization*, 133.

by YHWH and reaffirmed by the words and life of Christ is that of chaos itself. Having embraced the powerlessness of humankind in the paschal mystery, Jesus opens himself to the recreative energy of God the Creator, embracing chaos not for itself alone but as the way to the humanly inconceivable life of the resurrection (Phil 2:7, 9). The church is in the chaos of confusion that can be ignored, but can instead be embraced, as Christ has done. The new church of Vatican II values has yet to take confident shape, but restorationist forces refuse to let the old church go. If only the rich potential of this liminal darkness could be grasped, for "now is the acceptable time: see, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). This is a time rich in potentiality for refounding the church through the passionate collaborative efforts of people in touch with the anxieties and hopes of people who possess boundless faith, imagination, and creativity to bring the Gospel alive within this postmodern world. Conditions could not be better.

Chapter 9

Culture(s) in Ecclesial Documents and Theologians

> At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task.
>
> —*Gaudium et Spes* 4[1]

The aim of this chapter is briefly to examine how some ecclesial documents and theologians define culture and cultures. If the definitions of culture are defective, theology will be uncertain or faulty. Theology is that which "mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."[2] Theologians must seek to discern where God is working and articulate a theology sensitive to the local culture. If their view of culture is a static one, their theology will be frozen in time and irrelevant. The church from the late seventeenth century, reacting against the Protestant Reformation, had become a cultural fortress, isolated from the world. The purpose of theology moved "from enquiry to *defence*, demonstration and 'proof.'"[3] Anything that did not support the theological status quo was seen as a threat to the integrated, unchanging, and thoroughly controlled worldwide ecclesiastical culture.

1. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* ed. Austin P. Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello, 1975), 4.

2. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), xi.

3. See Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 31.

The world could be changing, but there was no need for the culture of the church, and therefore theology, to change.[4]

There was an added problem during this period of the fortress church. It also accepted without question the classicist or normative notion of culture. As explained in Chapter 1, this definition of culture describes the process whereby people develop their intellectual, spiritual, and artistic qualities, and the actual intellectual and artistic achievements of people. The church saw itself as the guardian of the highest achievements of Western intellectual and artistic gifts. No other culture had anything of value to offer. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, (1904–84) summarized the impact of this conclusion on theology: "When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature,"[5] not on how it is to relate to a changing world.

If, however, we start with an empirical approach to culture, that is, the particular ways of living of a group of people as they search for meaning in the midst of constant change, inner tensions, fragmentation, and struggles over resources and power, the relationship between theology and culture changes.[6] Theology becomes "an ongoing process,"[7] no longer something static. Since there is such diversity of cultures, this process will result in many theologies.

Ecclesial Documents

Papal Expressions

In his Apostolic Constitution promulgating the first code of Canon Law in 1917, Pope Benedict XV summarizes the church's centuries-old classicist view of cultures beyond Rome in these words: "the Church was at pains . . . to abrogate the laws of barbarous nations and to reduce their rude customs to civilized form."[8] Pius XII in 1951 also used "culture" in the classicist sense, but with more sensitivity. He was promoting the

4. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

5. Ibid.

6. See Anna Green, *Cultural History: Theory and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 1–10.

7. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

8. Benedict XV, "Constitution 'Providentissima' Promulgating the New Code," in *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, ed. P. Chas Augustine, OSB, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1921), 65; see also insights by Neil Ormond, *Introducing Contemporary Theologies* (Newtown: E. J. Dwyer, 1990), 3–22.

exhibition of what missionaries have achieved "especially in the field of culture" for distant peoples, "who sometimes boast a very old and highly developed culture of their own."[9] In 1953 the pope used "culture" in an empirical sense when declaring that "the right to one's culture and national character . . . are exigencies of the law of nations dictated by nature itself."[10] John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), 1963, when speaking of the "right to share in the benefits of culture," used the term in the classicist sense, but later, in adopting the expression "ethnic group," he was referring to culture according to its empirical meaning.[11]

Vatican II

In the documents of Vatican II and subsequent ecclesial documents "culture" is most frequently to be understood in its classicist sense.[12] The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) contains the most direct references to culture, but with confusing results. The authors use the classicist or humanistic definition; thus "culture" refers to "all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments" (GS 53).[13] Then, in the same paragraph, they acknowledge its empirical meaning when they write that "'culture' often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations." Overall, the emphasis in the document is on the classicist meanings of culture, but in a highly significant passage we read that evangelizers must "foster vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures" (GS 44). Here the reference is clearly to the empirical meaning of culture. The council ended in 1965 just as the postmodern revolution was beginning, but there is no intimation of this in *Gaudium et Spes*. If anything, the document assumes some of the optimistic ideas of modernity about capacity for human progress.

9. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter "On Promoting Catholic Missions" (1951), in *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa,* ed. Raymond Hickey, OSA (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 99.

10. Pius XII, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 45 (6 December 1953), 794.

11. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter "Peace on Earth" (*Pacem in Terris*), 11 April 1963, 13, 43.

12. For analyses of the use of "culture" in Vatican II documents see Michael P. Gallagher, SJ, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1997), 36–55, and Phillip Tovey, *Inculturation of Christian Worship: Exploring the Eucharist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), 112–17.

13. See Charles M. Murphy, "The Church and Culture since Vatican II: On the Analogy of Faith and Art," *Theological Studies* 48 (June 1987): 317–31.

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) the emphasis is on revising liturgical rites in order to encourage the "active participation in liturgical celebrations" of all the faithful (SC 14). The ritual should be simplified to make it more comprehensible: "The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear, and free from useless repetitions. They should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation" (SC 34).

At first sight this is an estimable principle, but not all cultures appreciate "noble simplicity"; on the contrary, many value significant repetition as the best way to communicate meaning. Such is the case with a number of Polynesian and African peoples whose ways of communicating are filled with colorful symbolic repetitions. "Noble simplicity," therefore, can be offensive. The principle of liturgical reform behind the document is in fact the revival of the "noble simplicity" of Roman cultural values, which are now to be reimposed on the world church. While the document says there is room for "legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in mission countries," nonetheless "the substantial unity of the Roman rite is [to be] preserved" (SC 38).

Anthropologists Mary Douglas and Victor Turner forcefully criticize this stress on "noble simplicity," complaining that reform is now to be dominated by rational criteria in which symbolism and mythology have little or no place (see chap. 1) and where the emphasis is to be on an intellectual understanding through the use of words, with little or nothing that speaks to the heart.[14] This is not to deny the importance of a sound theological or intellectual foundation for liturgy, but liturgy must be more than this. It must be able to touch the hearts of people in ways appropriate to their different cultures. Turner further complains that the reform is based on the outdated modern structural-functionalist definition of culture.[15] A functionalist approach to liturgical reform requires that liturgies must mirror the structure of the culture in which they are devised, but, as already noted, the reform assumes that the Roman culture with its emphasis on "noble simplicity" is the norm for all liturgies. No significant diversion from this is possible. Further, the purpose is that

14. See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 4.

15. See Victor Turner, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas," *Worship* 46 (August-September 1972): 392.

unity and harmony must prevail, even at the cost of legitimate diversity in ritual.

In 1986 the then-Cardinal Ratzinger was also highly critical of some of the renewal experiments in the liturgy.[16] The primary aim of the liturgy, he reminds us, is the worship of the Triune God, not the bonding of a community. When this is forgotten the liturgy becomes banal, primarily concerned with making people feel good. All members of the congregation are expected to be doing things together, such as singing and vocalizing responses. If not, there is no participation. Moments of silence, in which people can enter into a contemplative stance before God, must not occur. Ratzinger's criticism is valid, because those who overemphasize the bonding nature of liturgy are in fact adopting Emile Durkheim's view of religion. For Durkheim the primary purpose of music and chants is to generate collective emotional excitement or collective effervescence, not the worship of God.[17]

Paul VI

Under Pope Paul VI ecclesial documents begin to use the term "culture" more frequently in empirical ways. In both his first encyclical, On the Church (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 1964) and in On the Progress of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*, 1965) he confines himself to the classicist approach.[18] However, in his pastoral document On the Pastoral Care of Migrants (*Pastoralis Migratorium*, 1969), his speeches while on overseas visits particularly to Africa,[19] and in his inspirational Apostolic Letter On Evangelization (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975) there is a sharp focus on the social and religious implications of the empirical definition of culture. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* contains several significant changes in the way culture is presented. Written in 1975 when cultural anthropology was beginning its revolutionary reinterpretation of culture, the document

16. See Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 123–43.

17. See Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), 427.

18. See Paul VI, "Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*," in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since John XXIII*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 399.

19. See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 206–21.

reflects something of this radical rethinking, particularly the semiotic approach of Clifford Geertz and even that of Claude Levi-Strauss. First, it no longer speaks of culture in the abstract sense but several times refers to "culture or cultures" (EN 20).[20] Second, it refers to the need to use a people's "language, their signs and symbols" (EN 63). There is also the hint that cultures must not be considered as homogeneous or static because evangelization will be ineffective "if it does not answer the questions [the people] ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life" (EN 63). There is an undercurrent of some disquiet about the state of culture and cultures throughout the world (see EN 20, 63), but this would be the only acknowledgment of the chaotic influences of postmodernity. Given the fact that the letter was written in the mid-1970s it is surprising that postmodernity was so lightly treated.

John Paul II

From the beginning of John Paul II's pontificate he forthrightly focused on the fundamental importance of understanding and interacting with cultures as the prerequisite for effective evangelization. But it is not always clear how he was defining the term. Usually "culture" was used not in an empirical way, but according to its classicist definition. While analyzing the prodigious nature of the pope's pronouncements, Michael Gallagher, SJ, is able to distinguish three different ways in which the pope uses culture, although they may overlap at times: the classicist understanding, but often with a strong theological critique included; the sociological meaning of the term; and finally references in concrete terms to particular or local cultures.[21] An example of the classicist approach is his identification in 1980 of the dichotomy between "civilization of love" and the "culture of death."[22]

Examples of the empirical use of culture are evident in his encyclical Mission of the Redeemer (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990).[23] When he uses the word "culture" in this document he follows the modern definition, that it is something frozen in time, homogeneous and resistant to external

20. See Paul VI, Apostolic Letter "On Evangelization" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), 1975 (Sydney: St Paul Publications, 1982).

21. See Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 48.

22. See Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36–37.

23. See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter "Mission of the Redeemer" (*Redemptoris Missio*), 1990 (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1991).

influences, but at the same time he frequently describes situations that are characteristically postmodern, such as the impact of megacities on cultural change, problems facing minorities, the threats to the environment (RM 37). In another encyclical letter, Apostles of the Slavs (*Slavorum Apostoli*, 1985), he emphasizes the part Saints Cyril and Methodius played in the development of Slavonic culture in the ninth century. While declaring these two saints the heavenly co-patrons of the whole of Europe, the pope uses the occasion to remind Europe that it owes its cultural identity to the founding Roman Catholic myth or story and emphasizes the importance of that myth for maintaining primal unity today. At no point does he refer to any fundamental crisis affecting the church or even to Protestantism.[24] He is using culture not in the empirical sense but as synonymous with intellectual and artistic achievements. Europe, in his view, is the model for the rest of the world of how these accomplishments can be attained through the interaction of the Gospel with cultures. As Aylward Shorter comments, the pope accepts the fact that cultures other than that of Europe exist, but he "places them lower down on the cultural scale."[25]

Confusion over the definition of culture is to be found also in documents from Vatican departments and episcopal statements. In 1994 the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued the Instruction, *Varietates Legitimae*, to provide more detailed pastoral guidelines for the correct adaptation of the liturgy. Adaptation, however, is to be understood in light of the modern definition of culture as an integrated and integrating whole. At the same time it describes changes and internal tensions within cultures that are distinctly postmodern, such as pointing out that a single country can contain many different cultures mainly due to immigration (VL 6, 49-50).[26] There is also an acknowledgment that singing among some peoples is "instinctively accompanied by handclapping, rhythmic swaying and dance movements" and that these "forms of external expression can have a place in the liturgical actions of these peoples" (VL 42). However, despite the frequent emphasis on the importance of local cultures in liturgies, the empirical culture into which all cultures must ultimately be assimilated is the present homogeneous, unchanging, and integrating ecclesiastical Roman

24. See Richard H. Roberts, "The Construals of 'Europe': Religion, Theology and the Problematics of Modernity," in *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, ed. David Martin, 195–97 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

25. Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 233.

26. See the overview by Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 204), 227–32.

culture. The Roman rite is one very significant expression of this underlying culture. No substantial change in this rite, or in the culture of which the rite is but a visible expression, is to be allowed: "The process of inculturation should maintain the substantial unity of the Roman rite. . . . The work of inculturation does not foresee the creation of new families of rites; inculturation responds to the needs of a particular culture and leads to adaptations which still remain part of the Roman rite" (VL 36).

Statements like this assume there are no tensions and struggles for power within the ecclesiastical Roman culture. On the contrary, there has been and continues to be significant disquiet on the part of several episcopal conferences. They complain that their legitimate authority is being undermined by the centralizing authority of the Roman curial bureaucracy.[27] The fact that vernacular translations of liturgical texts, for example, must be submitted to Rome for approval is farcical, for there is no official person in Rome who knows complex languages such as the multiple tongues of Africa, Polynesia, and Melanesia. As Bishop Francisco Claver says, "the best judges of the correctness, even theological, of translations and texts are the faithful and clergy of the place where the language is spoken."[28] With evidence like this Nathan Mitchell is correct in stating that "it is difficult to erase the impression that [the document] seeks to *re-centralize* decisions. . . . [That there is] continued Roman discomfort with the power granted Episcopal conferences . . . is evident."[29]

A description of three types of myth, namely public, operative, and residual myths (chap. 1), may help to explain the confusion within the document. A public myth is one that is claimed by those in power to bind a group of people together; an operative myth is what *actually* at a particular time gives people a cohesive identity, and this myth can and often does differ dramatically from the public myth. The residual myth is a myth from former times that potentially is capable of resurfacing as the operative myth, often on the initiative of those who have power to resurrect it. The public myth in the document is that "the liturgy of the church must not be foreign to any country. . . . It must be capable of expressing itself in every human culture" (VL 18). However, the operative myth is now the resurfaced pre-Vatican II residual myth, namely, that the unchanging

27. See the observations by Nathan Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," *Worship* 68 (July 1994): 371–76.

28. Francisco Claver, "Inculturation as Dialogue," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 101.

29. Mitchell, "Amen Corner," 371–72.

Roman culture must be imposed on all local churches as the integrating force for uniformity.[30]

At one point in the document there is some ingenuousness about the lack of need for inculturation in Europe: "In countries with a Christian tradition . . . it is not so much a matter of inculturation . . . but rather a matter of insisting on liturgical formation" (VL 8). This statement takes no account of the enormity of the postmodern cultural shifts that have occurred in Europe; it gives the impression that countries outside Europe such as those in Asia and Africa alone require the process of inculturation.

Two further documents illustrate the confusion over the nature of culture. In 1989 the International Theological Commission, under the presidency of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, published a document entitled Faith and Inculturation. It begins by summarizing the chapter devoted to the promotion of culture in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II. It then proceeds to use the word culture in the several different senses of that document, but with no reference at any point to the radical rethinking of the word in cultural anthropology since 1963. Like Vatican II, it acknowledges modernity with its "its undeniable progress in many cultural and material domains,"[31] but there is no reference to the realities of postmodernity and its impact on our understanding of culture. However, it is insistent that "We must develop a *capacity to analyse cultures*."[32] This indicates that the authors are aware of the urgency not just for theological research but for sound empirical analysis as well.

In 1999 the Pontifical Council for Culture, an important initiative of John Paul II in 1982, published a lengthy statement, Toward a Pastoral Approach to Culture. The authors' task is to examine "what is meant by culture,"[33] but they follow unchanged the confusing meanings of the word characteristic of the documents of Vatican II thirty-six years before.[34] However, the document does refer to critical postmodern cultural issues, for example the breakdown of cultural identity resulting from the

30. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 203–5.

31. See International Theological Commission, "Faith and Inculturation" (1988), published in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55 (1989): 157.

32. Ibid. Italics in original.

33. Pontifical Council for Culture, "Toward a Pastoral Approach to Culture," *Origins* 29, no. 5 (17 June 1999), §2.

34. See ibid., §39.

movement of people from rural areas to cities and the rise of new religious movements.

United States Catholic Conference

In 1994 the Department of Education of the United States Catholic Conference issued a document called Principles for Inculturation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, to offer catechetical and pastoral leaders guidelines for the implementation of the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. To assist in this aim it provides a "summary of the key principles of inculturation, pointing out some of the major challenges these principles face and offering concrete recommendations to carry out a truly inculturated catechesis."[35] Unfortunately, despite its good intentions, the document starts with a modern definition of culture, with its emphasis on homogeneity, namely that which "embraces the totality of the life of the group and the life of each individual who belongs to it."[36] At the same time, as in the documents already noted, it does refer to issues that are postmodern, such as the rise of religious sects, the growing variety of language and cultural groups in parishes, and the difficulties these present for evangelization. There is the clash between an unreal image of a homogeneous, all-embracing unity of culture as envisaged in a parish and the divisiveness and tensions evoked by these factors. As long as the document assumes the modern definition of culture is the correct one, then, at least unconsciously, diversity and tensions will be considered human aberrations.

Theologians

Bernard Lonergan rejected the Eurocentric classicist definition of culture in favor of an empirical one and sought to create a theology, based on new philosophical foundations, that could be intelligible to people in very different and changing cultures.[37] The highly respected theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88), however, used the word

35. United States Catholic Conference, Department of Education, "Principles for Inculturation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church" (Washington, DC: USCC, 1994), 1.

36. Ibid.

37. See Lonergan, *Method*, 300–302.

"culture" in a classicist sense as synonymous with European intellectual and artistic achievements. He rejected a kind of Christian integralism that claims that Christian thinking has nothing to learn from any dialogue with human culture, as defined of course in the classicist sense. At the same time he refused to accept the claim that Christian faith is to be measured by the norms of human culture.[38]

For Karl Rahner, SJ (1904–84) theology may discover "its most significant dialogical partner not in philosophy but in the natural, psychological, and social sciences which shape people's self-understanding in the present."[39] Rahner severed his links with traditional theology of the church because it does not begin with the actual lives of men and women in the contemporary world. These people, not the church's dogmatic statements of faith, are to be the springboard for theological reflection; hence his focus was a pastoral theology that makes sense to people living their faith in the world. He was also sensitive to the fact that cultures are in rapid change and the world church needs to be urgently sensitive to this reality.

Rahner left no ambiguity about his rejection of a classicist Eurocentric culture when he wrote (in rather complex Rahnerian style):

> [One] can consider the official activity of the Church . . . and see clearly that despite the implied contradiction to its essence, the actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe was in fact . . . the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior.[40]

Rahner was a postmodern theologian in the sense that he deliberately began his theology with the human person in the midst of rapidly changing cultural and contentious situations.[41] Though he did not formally

38. See David S. Yeago, "Literature in the Drama of Nature and Grace: von Balthasar's Paradigm for a Theology of Culture," in *Glory, Grace, and Culture*, ed. Ed Block Jr., 88–106 (New York: Paulist, 2005).

39. Ann Carr, "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner," *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973): 373.

40. Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (December 1979): 717.

41. See the interesting comments by Michael Purcell, "Rahner amid Modernity and Post-Modernity," *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, eds. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, 195–210 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

discuss the nature of culture, he rejected as unreal the homogeneous and unchanging cultural model of the universal church. It is not only a divinely established church, but at the same time a very human multicultural process,[42] and subject to tensions of all kinds.[43] Because he recognized that cultures are filled with the diversity of individual and group myths, history, ways of speaking and communicating, he concluded that "there will no longer be any one single and universal basic formula of the Christian faith applicable to the whole Church and, indeed, prescribed for her as authoritatively binding."[44] This is an extraordinarily bold conclusion to make when so few in the church in 1974 would have been aware of the postmodern insight into culture.

Many of Rahner's successors such as Johann Baptist Metz, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether follow his method. However, they begin their theological reflections not with humankind in general but instead with the evil and systemic injustice in particular cultural and historical situations. They develop specific types of theology. Metz, for example, recognizes the need to develop a theology that is praxis-oriented, which necessitates focusing on political power, a quality of all human actions that can be insidiously used even by theologians to oppress others. So Metz inquires "who should do theology and where, in whose interests and for whom?"[45] Liberation theology, as it has evolved under the leadership of theologians like Gutiérrez, is faith confronting the cultures of poverty in all its oppressive forms. It is a distinctly postmodern approach to culture. It recognizes not just the many-faceted aspects of poverty such as the manipulation of the power structures by people who are rich, but also the critical role of people who are poor as agents and subjects of change. This theology does not try to make people who are poor rich, or those who are rich poor, but "to guide the transformation of all human beings into new ways of being human."[46]

Feminist theology, which owes its beginning in significant ways to liberation theology and the writings of Foucault, first focuses on patriarchal

42. Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation," 718.

43. See Karl Rahner, *Concern for the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 143–53.

44. Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Problems Involved in Devising a Short Formula of Faith," *Theological Investigations* XI (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 233.

45. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), 58–59.

46. Rebecca S. Chopp, "Latin American Liberation Theology," in *The Modern Theologians* vol. 2, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 173.

power in cultures that make the fundamental assumption that males possess human qualities defining them as superior and dominant and females as inferior and passive. Feminist theologians aim to rebuild the fundamental theological symbols of God, male and female, creation, sin and redemption, and the church, in order to formulate these symbols in a gender-inclusive and egalitarian way.[47] Theologians such as Kwok Pui-lan and Mercy Amba Oduyoye highlight the particular patriarchal problems women in the Third World have to face. They must fight not only against the patriarchal assumptions imported by colonial powers, but also against beliefs of the men in their own local cultures who "create myths of homogeneous national and cultural identity"[48] in which women are second-class people. So Third World feminist theologians "have the double tasks of challenging androcentric myths and practices in their culture and in Christianity."[49] Ursula King concludes in light of these twofold tasks that the theme of liberation is more concrete and vivid in Third World feminist theology than in that of the Western world. Also the theme of "church as community" is much stronger among feminist theologians in the Third World than in the First World because church communities are often the first place in which women have the chance to reflect and speak openly about the patriarchal and cultural oppression they experience.[50]

Finally, there is a small group of contemporary theologians who are also aware of the postmodern understanding of culture and apply it in their theological reflections. Among them are David Tracy,[51] Peter Phan, Kathryn Tanner, Michael Gallagher,[52] Delwin Brown,[53] David Ford,[54] and

47. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan F. Parsons, 3–22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

48. Kwok Pui-Ian, "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse," in Parsons, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 27.

49. Ibid., 28.

50. See Ursula King, "Introduction," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. eadem, 18–19 (London: SPCK, 1994).

51. See David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 548–70.

52. See Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*.

53. See Delwin Brown, "Refashioning Self and Other: Theology, Academy, and the New Ethnography," in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, eds. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner, 41–70 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

54. See David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12–15.

Nicholas Lash.[55] Tanner systematically analyzes the postmodern notion of culture and briefly explains that it opens up new vistas for theology, especially on how we are to view the purpose of theology, theological diversity, inculturation, and even Christianity's own cultural identity.[56] Phan skillfully summarizes the main insights of the postmodern understanding of culture and then shows that particular ecclesial statements on the reform of the liturgy are based on cultural anthropological research that is now inadequate.[57]

Theological Reflection

Paul Tillich (1886–1965), one of the most influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century and a prophetic writer on the relationship between Christianity and culture, reminds us that "the unconditional claim of Christianity is not related to the Christian Church, but to the event on which it is based,"[58] namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything ultimately must be judged by this event, including the cultures of churches themselves: "If the Church does not subject itself to the judgment [of this event] . . . it becomes idolatrous toward itself." Tillich then critiques the Catholic Church: "This is the tragedy of the Roman Catholic Church. Its way of dealing with culture is the result of its unwillingness to subject itself to the judgment [of this event] . . . ."[59] These are harsh words to hear. Is there some truth in them? How are theologians to react to them?

55. See Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, 3–33.

56. See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

57. See Peter Phan, *Being Religious*, 213–44.

58. Paul Tillich, "The Church and Contemporary Culture," *World Christian Education*, Second Quarterly (1956): 41.

59. Ibid.

Chapter 10

Jesus Christ, Social Dramas, and Inculturation: Lessons

> Jesus was . . . summoning his hearers to *be* Israel in a new way, to take up their proper roles in God's unfolding drama.
>
> —N. T. Wright, "The Mission and Message of Jesus"[1]

Inculturation is a dialectical interaction between Christian faith and cultures in which these cultures are challenged, affirmed, and transformed toward the reign of God, and in which Christian faith is likewise challenged, affirmed, and enhanced by this experience. When interacting with members of his own complex culture and with people of other cultures Jesus Christ fosters this dialectical exchange characteristic of inculturation. As Jesus inaugurates the reign of God through proclaiming the Good News of God's love for all, healing the sick, welcoming outcasts (see Luke 4:16-21; Matt 11:4-6; 25:31-46), he is in fact at the same time dialectically interacting with cultures and providing us with examples of inculturation.[2] The purpose of this chapter is to analyze some of these examples and to highlight some of the important qualities Jesus requires in agents of inculturation.

Cultural Background

The modern definition of culture does not fit the world Jesus lives in; in fact, the postmodern notion of culture best describes his environment.

1. N. T. Wright, "The Mission and Message of Jesus," in idem and Marcus Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1999), 36.

2. See Thomas Groome, "Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context," *Concilium* 2 (1994): 120–22.

There was nothing discrete, homogeneous, and integrating about his cultural world because it was filled with all kinds of tensions, fragmentation, and subcultural differences.

Jesus was born into a Jerusalem kingdom ruled by a king, installed and protected by the Roman empire. The culture of the Roman world in the time of Jesus was very much divided among a small, rich, politically powerful upper class that included representatives of the Roman colonial power; a relatively small intermediary class consisting of small landowners, craftsmen, and shopkeepers; then a large peasant population of tenant and subsistence farmers struggling to survive in harsh climatic conditions. Beneath the peasant class would have been slaves and the really poor and unclean such as lepers, the blind, the lame.[3] It was a precarious existence for the sizeable peasant population, pressured by difficult conditions for agriculture and the oppressive demands of their rich landlords and the political elite. Not surprisingly, therefore, when the disciples were unable to catch any fish, they knew they would go hungry (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:3-5). Then there was the religious structure that included the Pharisees and Sadducees. There was also extensive banditry, even of a potentially revolutionary kind, supported not only by peasants but also by some Pharisees and members of the upper class. And to further exacerbate these internal divisions and tensions there were the added pressures evoked by a complex cultural system of shame and honor affecting all relationships. Honor is a person's or group's sense of self-worth and the public, social acceptance of that assessment. Honor is the foundation of one's reputation, of one's social status in the community.[4] "To feel shame" means that mocking or stigmatizing by others is hitting home. It is that piercing feeling of worthlessness, of having no honor in society, that the psalmist describes in such vivid language: "All day long . . . shame has covered my face (Ps 44:15) . . . Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair" (Ps 69:20).

Jesus Uses Inculturation

Let us examine some examples of the ways in which Jesus by his preaching and example fosters the process of inculturation. He uses social dramas as occasions to instruct his followers about how his message

3. See John Stambaugh and David Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians* (London: SPCK, 1986), 68–81.

4. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 79–87.

must challenge or affirm cultural values and rituals; for this they require appropriate qualities. As explained earlier, social dramas (chap. 6) begin with a break in relations between people or groups within a cultural situation, followed by a phase of mounting crisis or liminality. This is the stage of dramatic tension with highly uncertain outcomes. The final stage is marked either by reintegration of the disrupted group or by the formalization of irreparable schism between the conflicting people involved.

Inculturation by Listening

In the social drama of the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10:46-52), Jesus spectacularly models by his actions and attitudes the way his followers, according to his concern for a "preferential option for the poor," must relate to people trapped in a subculture of poverty. The drama focuses not only on Bartimaeus but also on the crowd. Jesus and Bartimaeus are calling the crowd to believe in the Good News. The drama for them is: will they accept the invitation?

The drama begins with Bartimaeus "sitting by the roadside" (v. 46). In this one statement we have a description of two types of poverty. As a beggar Bartimaeus is caught in the poverty trap: no regular income, poor diet, little energy, and tempted to give way to fatalism. In addition he is blind. Because of his particular type of blindness he is stigmatized and socially excluded by society since he ritually endangers the clean. For his family and former friends he no longer exists. In the words of the psalmist, "I am . . . an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me" (Ps 31:11). Without honor he is assumed to have sinned, and God is punishing him for this. The words "sitting by the roadside" symbolically describe this social exclusion and stigmatization. The only identity he possesses is that of a beggar, which is a very precarious one indeed.

The liminal stage commences when Jesus is passing by and Bartimaeus cries out for healing, addressing Jesus with a distinctive messianic emphasis: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 47). The crowd do their best to silence him: "Many sternly ordered him to be quiet" (v. 48), but without success. People who are poor, especially those who are ritually unclean, must remain silent, accepting their shameful fate. This is a culture of violence—the dehumanizing of people—and no one questions it. The people in the crowd have followed Jesus and listened to his words on compassion and justice, but they remain blinded by their

religious and cultural prejudice against people like Bartimaeus. How will Jesus react? Jesus will have none of this fundamentalist and violent nonsense as he calls Bartimaeus to his side and gently asks him what he desires: "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:51). Jesus actually listens to a poor person, contrary to the culture of his time. Bartimaeus replies: "My teacher, let me see again!"(v. 51). It is not just sight he is begging for. He is yearning to become a full member of society again, one who can freely contribute to society with a sense of pride and responsibility. By speaking directly to Bartimaeus—socially a non-person—Jesus breaks through the political, economic, and cultural barriers that entrap the blind man. By defying these stigmatizing, discriminating, and rigid customs Jesus allows Bartimaeus to rediscover his ability to be and act like a human person with dignity. In brief, there are four interconnected lessons in this drama that illuminate the heart of inculturation.

Inculturation is Person-Centered

One gift of postmodernity is the call to refocus on the human person. Jesus exemplifies this in all his actions, so richly evident in his relationship with Bartimaeus. Jesus will not be distracted by the self-righteousness of the crowd around him: "Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here'" (v. 49).

Inculturation is a Collaborative Process

Bartimaeus is in the liminal space of rejection by society. Jesus by his very presence, attitude, and actions inspires Bartimaeus to make an act of faith. He proves that his act of faith is authentic by refusing any longer to accept the cultural stigma that those who are poor must remain silent. When the crowd order him to stop he bluntly refuses to be bullied into silence: "he cried out even more loudly" (v. 48). The ultimate test of inculturation is willingness to act on the basis of faith. The focus at this point is on Bartimaeus, who by his actions is himself an agent of inculturation, challenging in collaboration with Jesus the crowd's culture that rejects people who are poor.

Inculturation Requires Spiritual and Human Gifts

The gift most needed in evangelizers is the ability to listen and converse with people in a way that respects their human dignity. Listening is the gift of getting behind the words of another person, of entering

their hearts where words are ultimately unimportant. Hence inculturation cannot be something to be decided by outsiders without the full participation of people within their own cultural settings. Jesus, the evangelizer, enters into an empathetic dialogue with Bartimaeus, and in the process critiques the culture that brands certain people as unclean and to be avoided: "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 51). Jesus knows Bartimaeus is blind, and he could have acted without asking this question of the victim, but that would have been an insulting action. Jesus respects the dignity of Bartimaeus and knows that thinking about justice begins by listening to those who know about injustice.

Liberation is an Integral Part of Inculturation

The incident shows that liberation is not something in addition to inculturation but is an *integral* quality of the inculturating process. Through his actions Jesus illustrates that the healing of poverty must be holistic: social, cultural, economic, spiritual. Charity without the pursuit of justice is not holistic. Jesus, therefore, reacts in two prophetic ways to Bartimaeus's plight: he acts *for* and *with* the victim in order to break the several imprisoning layers of poverty. By his actions Jesus is forcefully saying to the crowd that their prejudices contradict his teaching about the dignity of every person. Every person has the right to be respected. In this, Jesus is an advocate *for* people who are oppressed by the prejudices of society.

Jesus also stands *with* Bartimaeus. In listening to him he empowers him to come forward despite his rejection by the crowd. By allying himself with Bartimaeus, Jesus is himself risking a similar marginalization. He lives what he is later to call his disciples to do: "for I was hungry and you gave me food . . . in prison and you visited me" (Matt 25:35, 36). The incident significantly ends with the description of holistic healing: "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him along the way" (v. 52). No longer is Bartimaeus marginalized by society by being forced to sit at the *side* of the road. Now through the collaborative action of Jesus and Bartimaeus the once-rejected blind man is again a vital member of the community. He has the right to walk unchallenged "along the way."

Inculturation Reaffirms Goodness in Mythology

The crowd's original exclusion of Bartimaeus illustrates that they have forgotten a foundational mythological value of hospitality. The Israelites, since they had been strangers in Egypt, were expected to show

hospitality in turn to strangers in their midst (Exod 23:9):[5] "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev 19:33-34). The prophets often speak of the duty of giving to the poor as an expression of hospitality, but their emphasis is primarily on its justice quality rather than on what today we would call philanthropy, that is, giving from one's surplus. Philanthropy, however, is also encouraged (Prov 3:27-28; 28:27). There is a strong emphasis on hospitality also in the New Testament; it is an integral part of Jesus' teaching and behavior (see Luke 7:36-50). Those who do not receive his disciples as guests are rejecting Christ himself (Matt 10:9-16).[6] Jesus insists in his conversation with the rich young man that to give *all* one's goods to the poor is a condition for becoming his follower (Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21).[7] The point he is dramatically making is that all goods ultimately belong to God and hence we must not be exclusively attached to them.[8]

Thus when the crowd turn against Bartimaeus they are forgetting the Jewish tradition and Jesus seeks to re-endorse this mythology. In the process Jesus is inviting the crowd, in imitation of the example of Bartimaeus, to make an act of faith themselves and reject their aberrant behavior. Jesus looks at the crowd and says to them, "Call him here" (Mark 10:49). Will they obey Jesus, or will they refuse? In this liminal moment they will either reject or accept Christ. The fact that the crowd immediately and enthusiastically call Bartimaeus shows that some at least are now prepared to challenge the culture of violence against people who are poor: "they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.'" (Mark 10:49) Now the honorable thing to do is to follow Christ, even if this means suffering public shame at the hands of those who do not yet believe and are still prepared to stigmatize the poor as impure.

5. See Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 244.

6. See Abraham J. Malherbe, "Hospitality," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible,* ed. Bruce M Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, 292–93 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

7. See John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 21.

8. See Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 244.

Openness to Learn

In one of the most touching incidents in the gospels, Jesus is called to evangelize beyond his cultural borders while journeying through the region of Tyre (Mark 7:24-30). Looking for privacy, he seeks shelter in a house, but a strong-minded woman, with a little daughter suffering from an unclean spirit, forces her way into his presence and falls at his feet begging him for a cure. The woman is a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin (v. 26) and has heard people speak of Jesus. Not only is she a woman without honor in the Jewish culture, she dares to invade Jesus' privacy, disregarding the Gentile-Jewish cultural gap between herself and him. She is so determined that she also ignores the custom of not speaking to Jesus without a male patron.[9] This is the liminal moment in the drama not only for the woman but also in a startling way for Jesus. Will he put aside his Jewish cultural rejection of a foreigner and a woman?

Jesus strongly rejects her request, giving as an excuse the cultural tradition that Israel has priority in his ministry (Matt 10:5-6; 15:24). He uses the analogy well known in his culture in which children in a family are to be given food first, then what is left over is to be tossed into the streets for dogs (Luke 16:20). The Gentiles will have to wait until the people of Israel have heard his Good News. Then the dialogue takes a surprising turn. The woman will not be dismissed so easily. She actually calls Jesus to be converted by his own message, though this will mean publicly rejecting cultural norms of his society. Rather brilliantly she pushes the analogy about the dogs beyond what Jesus intends because she says that dogs under the table sometimes eat the children's crumbs while the children are still at dinner. Unlike the dogs outside the house, these do not have to wait. Impressed not only by her persistence but also by her surprising response, Jesus grants the request (Mark 7:29-30). Jesus puts aside cultural prejudices through the persistence of a woman. This is not the only time Jesus is successfully challenged to act through the tenacity of a woman (see John 2:12). The incident is also a reminder that to encounter those who are marginalized, evangelizers themselves must risk being marginalized. By challenging the cultural prejudices Jesus allows himself to be pushed farther toward the boundaries of his culture. What an example of humility to his disciples!

9. See Virgil Howard and David B. Peabody, "Mark," *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. William R. Farmer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 1349, and Craig A. Evans, "Mark," *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1081.

Inculturation Requires Dialogue

The description of Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:1-42) is a particularly rich example of a social drama containing powerful symbols of prejudice. In the drama there are two clashing mythologies supporting two racially opposed cultures. This illustrates how, with the building of trust, dialogue can be the catalyst for the transformation not just of the woman but also of Jesus; here they both represent the two antagonistic cultures. Simple and ordinary circumstances of daily life such as eating, walking, and even a request for a drink of water often become social dramas of special importance for Jesus in his ministry of inculturation. They are transformed into moments of revelation and grace. This is to happen in the event at the well.

In the drama the separation stage is marked by a simple appeal to a stranger for water. Jesus is journeying through a part of Samaria with his disciples. Weary from his ministry, he pauses to rest beside a famous Samaritan pilgrimage site, Jacob's well (John 4:4-6). While the disciples are absent buying food, a Samaritan woman of doubtful morality appears and she and Jesus, now alone, meet, with Jesus taking the initiative in asking for a drink of water. This surprises the woman for two reasons. It is a dishonorable thing for Jewish men to greet women in public, and second, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" (John 4:9). Jews look on Samaritans in a racist manner; they picture them as stupid, lazy, heretical, and a people possessed by the devil (John 8:48). John McKenzie, SJ, points out that there is "no deeper break of human relations in the contemporary world than the feud of Jews and Samaritans, and the breadth and depth of Jesus' doctrine of love could demand no greater act of a Jew than to accept a Samaritan"[10] as a brother or sister. Samaritan women had the additional stigma of being regarded as menstruants from birth, that is, inherently unclean.[11] Not surprisingly, therefore, it would later be a deadly insult to Jesus to call him a Samaritan (John 8:48). The Samaritans had similar degrading views of their Jewish neighbors. A Samaritan village would refuse Jesus and his disciples hospitality on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 9:52). So, in this chance meeting between Jesus and a woman of such stigmatized cultural and personal origins, the questions are: how is Jesus to handle the situation? Will he and/or she end the process of dialogue that has just begun? Will Jesus continue to act dishonorably, contrary to the norms of Jewish

10. McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 766.
11. See Teresa Okure, "John," *International Bible Commentary*, 1468.

culture? In fact, they will proceed through the second stage of the social drama, the liminality phase, both showing extraordinary skills of storytelling.[12]

Jesus fosters an atmosphere of trust between the woman and himself, which is a fundamental requirement of inculturation, by letting her know he is aware of her private life (vv. 16-19).[13] With confidence established, there are two key matters Jesus wishes to explain to the woman: that knowledge of God is a gift likened to "living water" (v. 11), and the revelation of the true identity of Jesus himself (v. 14). Pleased with her trust in him, Jesus leads her to grasp these two realities through a conversational dialogue that is deeply respectful of her and of her ancestral and religious traditions, while at the same time plainly pointing out that worship will not be confined to a definite place either in Jerusalem or on the sacred Samaritan mountain, but within Christ himself (vv. 20-26).

Now the event enters the third stage of the social drama, the reaggregation phase. At this point the woman is so transformed and energized by her conversion to Christ that she leaves behind her water jug, a symbol of human thirst and affections that can never be satisfied without Jesus Christ, and hastens to share her faith with her kinsfolk. (vv. 28-30, 39-42). There is a quite humorous touch to this incident because Jesus incongruously uses as his messenger to these Samaritan people a woman whose marital history is well known to them. However, there is a second drama that has yet to begin, and it focuses on the disciples. When they return with food they react as Jewish men are culturally expected to behave. They are startled, even annoyed and ashamed, that Jesus is speaking to a woman, and a Samaritan one at that (v. 27). This should not be! They urge him to eat, but he replies in a puzzling way by saying that his "food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (v. 34). By contrast with the enthusiastic Samaritan woman who has gained so much through her dialogue with Jesus, the disciples ironically give the impression of being uninterested in the dramatic nature of his words and do not seem to want to learn from the incident.

The events at the well reveal two important themes of the evangelist John: his particular theological emphasis and the missionary methods Jesus adopts in inculturation. The latter include beginning with the reali-

12. See J. Martin C. Scott, "John," *Eerdmans Commentary*, 1171.

13. Bishop Francisco Claver, SJ, has a short and helpful analysis of this incident from an inculturation perspective in his book *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 116.

ties of everyday life, showing respect for people and their mythologies or traditions. Even when Jesus disagrees with them, as in the case of the Samaritan belief about where true worship is to take place (John 4:20-24), he does so in a culturally respectful manner. At the same time, inculturation also calls us to struggle against the entrenched obstacles of race, sex, and class that degrade people.[14] These lessons are also evident in the following incidents.

Inculturation Recognizes Diversities

Jesus is constantly on the move in his ministry. Not only is he often pictured dining and interacting with "sinners" and with people, including tax collectors, who are normally considered socially or religiously unacceptable, but also with professional people like Pharisees. As in many of his actions this table fellowship, or the manner in which he debates with representatives of the professional classes, becomes a way in which the kingdom is actually inaugurated.[15] But in every case he adapts his missionary methods to diversities and tensions inherent in the subcultures he is relating to.

In the following examples the dramas are initiated not by Jesus but by professional people, the first and second by Pharisees and the third by a lawyer. In his dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) Jesus uses almost a debating and declamatory style that is characteristic of the professional class to which Nicodemus belongs. After a polite introductory comment, Nicodemus quickly draws Jesus into the liminal stage of the drama. He comes directly to the point of his visit by asking the question that is puzzling him: "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" (v. 4). At one point in the lengthy interaction Jesus actually reproaches Nicodemus for his disbelief (v. 10). There is no indication in the text as to how the liminal stage ended. Did Nicodemus leave converted and energized by the dialogue or did the theological gap between Jesus and Nicodemus widen? But the fact that he would publicly speak in support of the rights of Jesus for a hearing according to the law (John 7:50), and that he would bring a large and costly quantity of spices for the burial of Jesus (John 19:39), gives the strong impression that a deep friendship did emerge from the dialogue.

14. See Okure, "John," 1469.
15. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 148–49.

At another time Jesus is invited by Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50), who begins the drama by blatantly disregarding the courtesies normally accorded a notable visitor.[16] Guests were to be greeted at the door by the host, formally kissed, then have their feet washed by a servant, to be followed by water for the guests to wash face and hands prior to eating. Then a small amount of sweet-smelling ointment was given guests for their hair. Nothing of this is provided for Jesus. The liminal stage of the drama begins with the entry of a woman of shameful moral reputation who immediately begins "to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment" (v. 38). The host is shocked by what is happening and it convinces him that Jesus is not a prophet, because if he were a prophet he would know of the scandalous background of the woman and immediately stop her, but he does not do so (v. 39).

Sensing the host's reactions, Jesus rebukes the Pharisee, but in an indirect, respectful way that is in accordance with custom. When he reprimands Simon he is simultaneously affirming the importance of the cultural forms of greeting guests. After telling a story about a creditor who cancels the debts of two people, Jesus asks the host "which of [the debtors] will love him more?" (v. 42). Simon gives the correct answer. Then, turning to the woman, Jesus praises her for her behavior, which contrasts dramatically to that of Simon. She recognizes who Jesus is and yearns to show her gratitude for having her sins forgiven. Simon fails to recognize Jesus and so does not even begin to appreciate the enormity of his discourteous behavior. In the reaggregation stage Jesus congratulates the woman for her faith: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50). The gift of faith is offered to Simon and his other guests, but they do not accept it, despite the culturally respectful efforts of Jesus. This is a reminder that the faith process of inculturation cannot be imposed. It can be offered, and accepted or refused.

Inculturation Through Storytelling

Storytelling is a critically important method of clarifying identity (chap. 5) and Jesus in his use of parables is the brilliant master of this pedagogical art. Probably this is his most important method of inculturation, and his approach remains as relevant today as in his own time. In

16. See Samuel O. Abogunrin, "Luke," *International Bible Commentary*, 1393.

more than forty parables[17] he adopts a traditional Jewish way of teaching but gives the parables his unique emphasis with dazzling imagination and creativity.[18] The parables are fictitious, often humorous stories about ordinary individuals and the down-to-earth realities of everyday life his listeners could readily identify with: the world of farming and fishing, of droughts and floods, of weddings and feasts, of rich landowners and restless tenants, of travelers banging on the front door at night, and of a widow challenging an unjust judge. It is a culture without superficial embellishment in which even the hero of the parable can be a pragmatic plotter (Luke 16:1-8) or a seemingly impulsive landowner (Matt 20:1-16). But there is a quality to the parables not usually found in everyday stories: the insights are dramatically new. They are subversive stories because they fundamentally challenge listeners to reorder and remold the cultural and economic reality around them. The writers of the gospels also illustrate that the parables have multiple meanings. For Matthew (Matt 18:12-14), the Lost Sheep functions to exhort church leaders to care for the weak in the community; in Luke it justifies Jesus' mission to the lost (Luke 15:4-7).[19]

The stories are of varying length and contain a meaning or message over and above the straightforward and literal, with an element of metaphor. Consider the parable of the foolish rich farmer (Luke 12:13-21) who wonders what he can do with an abundant harvest. He decides to pull down his existing barns and build larger ones to cope with the harvest, then sit back and thoroughly enjoy life. But this is a stupid decision. The harvest is already in the fields waiting to be collected and there is no time to destroy his storage sheds and build new ones. An audience of peasants, daily confronted by the enormous gap between rich and poor, would have laughed uproariously at the bumbling, wealthy farmer who now has no barns and a copious rotting harvest in the fields. Then suddenly the man dies (12:20). The lesson is simple: economic prosperity

17. About one third of the documented sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are in the form of parables. See Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 7. The number of parables in the gospels is estimated to be as low as 35 and as high as 72, depending on the particular categorization by scholars.

18. See Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1, and John Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 3.

19. See Charles W. Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 100–104.

may satisfy a person's immediate comfort needs, but everyone is ultimately to be called to account for how wealth is used.

Inculturation Through Functional Substitution

Functional substitution, a particularly important method of inculturation, is a process whereby over a lengthy period of time a Christian meaning is gradually substituted for a non-Christian symbol, myth, or ritual. It assumes that symbols (chap. 2) can only change their meanings slowly. It respects the dignity of people because, while they may intellectually accept a new understanding of truths or rituals, it takes much longer for their hearts to feel comfortable with them. Jesus uses this pastoral method throughout his ministry, while creating new symbols such as the cross and the Eucharist. For example, he preaches in the familiar synagogue and shows himself a good Jew by frequenting the temple. But at the same time, when he uses traditional religious symbols and rituals he endows them with new meanings; for example, at the Last Supper the traditional Passover meal is given a much richer mythological significance. He helps his listeners to discover what is good and to be retained in traditional Jewish mythological life, and what needs to be changed through the introduction of new meanings.[20] Another example of functional substitution is his resourceful use of parables, as explained above.

Theological Reflection

Saint James gives this advice: "let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak" (Jas 1:19). How wise! In inculturation the most important quality of the evangelizer is the gift of listening, not teaching or speaking. What is the Spirit saying to us as we encounter not just other cultures but our own as well? In the above examples we see Jesus instinctively listening to people personally and to the cultural contexts in which they are living. At the same time he is a member of a particular culture containing many prejudices against outsiders, so Jesus must also be listening to himself to discover to what degree he is being affected by these prejudices. In the incident with the Syrophoenician woman he is being made publicly aware by her persistent intervention that he, in his humanity, is

20. See Arbuckle, *Laughing with God: Culture, Humor, and Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 113–32, 134–35.

filtering information through his own prejudiced culture. A powerful example of humility for every evangelizer!

In biblical terms the word "listen" means to hearken to the expression of another's will, to respond to it and to comply with it (Matt 7:21; Mark 3:35; John 12:47; Rom 2:13). But in order to respond and comply we must also abandon those cherished values and customs not in accordance with God's will. Choan-Seng Song speaks of Jesus being in the womb of darkness as he struggles to let go, to respond to and comply with the will of the Father. His prayer in the terrifying darkness of Gethsemane reveals the degree of abandonment expected of him if he listens to his Father (Mark 14:36).[21] This darkness is shattered by the heartrending cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). This cry is the definitive break with the cultural expectations of his people, who so yearned for a human king. Letting go of what is culturally familiar to us in order to venture into the unknown demands abundant faith. Inculturation is not a human technique, but above all a journey of faith, a journey of listening and letting go (Rom 1:15-17).

21. See Choan-Seng Song, *The Compassionate God: An Exercise in the Theology of Transposition* (London: SCM, 1982), 92.

Chapter 11
Cultures as Challenges to Inculturation

> [We] still do not understand the inculturation process all that well.
>
> —Robert Schreiter, "Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture"[1]

There are two reasons for the reluctance among theologians to accept the challenge to dialogue with cultures, writes Robert Schreiter. In the first place, there are no adequate methodologies among theologians "to break through some of the conceptual logjams, and a lack of tools that can be used readily and easily" by practitioners of inculturation. The conceptual blockages are an inadequate understanding of culture and confusion about the meaning of inculturation. Second, there is the official unwillingness at the international and local levels of the church "to permit legitimate experiments in inculturation and to sanction successful experiments for ongoing use."[2] There is a general reluctance, especially among many Western ecclesiastics, to accept the fact that the interpretation of their faith is significantly molded by their own cultures. Their culturally conditioned understandings of the Gospel are then assumed to be synonymous with the kingdom of God itself.

Previous chapters have clarified the nature of culture in the postmodern context. This chapter will focus directly on inculturation: explaining the confusion surrounding the term and the reasons why ecclesiastics do not encourage experimentation, showing the importance of inculturation as social drama, and finally, exploring the complex relationship between syncretism and inculturation.

1. Robert Schreiter, "Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture?" *Concilium* 2 (1994): 17.

2. Robert Schreiter, "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 758.

Definition

Since inculturation emerged as a theological term only in the 1970s, it is not surprising that there is still confusion about its precise meaning.[3] Inculturation as an expression was created in an effort to spell out two primary aspects of evangelization, namely, the object and the actual process of evangelization. Evangelization is to be directed at cultures; as Paul VI reminds us, "what matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)."[4] Consequently, inculturation is defined by Pedro Arrupe, SJ, as a process whereby the Christian faith becomes incarnated within "a particular culture, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming, and remaking it so as to being about a 'new creation.'"[5]

The word *faith* is used in defining inculturation in preference to Gospel or theology because faith connotes a twofold reality, namely, *what* we are called to believe by the Gospel and tradition and at the same time the *commitment* to act accordingly.[6]

Acculturation and Enculturation: Clarifications

Sometimes inculturation, a theological word denoting a faith-based process, is confused with *acculturation* and *enculturation,* both sociological terms.[7]

- *Acculturation* is the process of culture change in which contact between two or more culturally distinct groups results in one group taking over elements of the culture of the other group or

3. Among the clearest explanations of inculturation see the following: Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), and idem, *Evangelization and Culture* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), and Anthony Gittins, "Beyond Liturgical Inculturation: Transforming the Deep Structures of Faith," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 47–72.

4. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *On Evangelization* (Vatican: Sacred Congregation for Evangelization, 1975), 20.

5. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, cited by Michael Amaladoss, SJ, "Inculturation and Internationality," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 29 (1992): 239.

6. See Schreiter, "Faith and Cultures," 745, and Francis V. Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation* (Rome: Las, 1997), 99–101.

7. See Gittins, "Beyond Liturgical Inculturation," 48.

groups. For example, the sixth-century Sacramentary of Verona, which still forms the foundation for many liturgical prayers in the Roman church, introduced existing secular feudal notions of rank, honor and dignity into the rite of ordination, and together with it the notion of promotion through stages. Ministry thus came to be described in terms of an ecclesiastical career, each rank having its corresponding honors and dignity.[8] Acculturation, however, can be one stage in the inculturation process, as will later be explained.

- *Enculturation* is the conscious or unconscious conditioning occurring within the learning process whereby children or adults achieve competencies in their culture. So we can speak of an enculturation process whereby a person is introduced to, and learns, the practices of the Catholic Church, but it says nothing about whether or not persons and their actions are being transformed by their belief in Jesus Christ.

Often, and wrongly so, inculturation is made synonymous with the renewal of liturgical texts or practices. For example, a diocesan liturgical committee may legitimately decide to introduce some local customs into the liturgy to give it "cultural authenticity." It is then said that "the liturgy has been inculturated." This is not inculturation, though it may be a step in that direction. It is rather the acceptance of certain behavioral patterns by a particular cultural group, however estimable this might be, as directed by a particular diocesan liturgical committee.[9] The key test of inculturation is: are people's lives and cultures being transformed in faith? In fact, despite the extensive discussions and publications about liturgy and inculturation there is little satisfaction with the results.

Inculturation: Foundational Truths

Among truths of the Christian faith involved in the process of inculturation are the following:

8. See Theodore Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 32–37.

9. Ibid., 49.

1. The Holy Spirit is the source of all truth, no matter where it is found.

Certain church fathers such as Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria either explicitly or in an equivalent manner speak about the "seeds" sown by the Word of God in cultures.[10] Justin claims: "Everything good that has been said, no matter by whom, is Christian."[11] The Word of God is actively present, although in an incomplete way, in all cultures. This presence or glimmer of transcendence is the foreshadowing of the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and tradition. Whatever is good in cultures comes from the Spirit.[12] As Karl Rahner writes, "the very commonness of everyday things harbours the eternal marvel and silent mystery of God and [God's] grace."[13] John Paul II describes this foundational mystery of inculturation in these inspiring words: "Lying deep in every culture, there appears this impulse towards a fulfillment. We may say, then, that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation."[14]

2. As no one culture has normative status in expressing the truths of faith, those truths are translatable into all cultures.[15]

It took a revelation from God for Peter to discover the fundamental truth that "no one cultural expression of [Christianity] is exclusive for expressing the fullness of the gospel."[16] Inspired by the Holy Spirit, early Christianity broke from its exclusive ties to Judaism. As Peter says: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). Christianity then adopted in a highly effective way the dominant Hellenistic cultural framework of the Roman Empire as its missionary medium.

10. See Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, in *Origins* 21, no. 8 (4 July 1991): 125.

11. Justin the Martyr, cited by Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 94.

12. For a fuller description of this mystery see Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Laughing with God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 111–13.

13. Karl Rahner, *Belief Today* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 4.

14. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter "Faith and Reason" (*Fides et Ratio*), 1998, 71.

15. See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 74.

16. Ibid., 67.

Of this interaction John Paul II writes: "Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded . . . [but] the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought." He continues: "to reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God."[17] When the faith is first preached to a culture, therefore, it is proclaimed through the medium of a human language and culture; there is an *intercultural* experience. But the principle of "the Gentile breakthrough" must always remain operative. Of course, for Roman Catholics no culture is the arbiter of divine truth. The ultimate interpreter is the church's teaching authority. Nevertheless, key questions like the following must be persistently asked:

- What is essential to the faith and what is accidental to the culture it happens for the moment to be clothed in?
- Can the truths of our faith be expressed more effectively through the symbols of the culture(s) being evangelized?

3. Inculturation must embrace all human endeavors.

Inculturation is not to be confined to liturgical issues. It includes the liberation, the freeing of a people and cultures from all forms of domination and injustice. This also applies to evangelizers themselves, who must develop the insight and willingness to abandon their own cultural expressions of faith that do not pertain to the heart of the Good News. But the unmasking of cultural domination, for example prejudices and discrimination, is an extremely difficult process. Hence it is imperative in these postmodern times for theologians to collaborate with the social sciences, whose role it is to uncover the positive and negative qualities of cultures.[18]

4. Inculturation is the call to relive the incarnation and paschal mystery.

Whenever inculturation is occurring, Christ is again becoming flesh and living among his people in symbols familiar to them (John 1:14). At the same time this faith experience calls people and cultures into the

17. John Paul II, "Faith and Reason," 72.

18. See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 87–104.

very heart of the paschal mystery itself—a process of dying to attitudes, values, and customs that are not in conformity with Christ's message and an embracing of what is new: "Do not remember the former things . . . I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa 43:18-19).

5. The model of the church most suited to inculturation is that of the people of God.

Inculturation is not a process to be directed by experts alone; rather, it needs to be "an expression of the community's life."[19] The serious error following Vatican II was to entrust the renewal of the liturgy to scholars alone. The model of the church as the people of God is the most appropriate one to describe inculturation, for it focuses on the communal nature of the church rather than on its hierarchical or institutional aspects.

Inculturation, Dialogue, and Postmodernity

Contextual theology is the process of trying to understand the Christian faith in relation to a particular context. Stephen Bevans, SVD, has significantly and skillfully identified several models that are not mutually exclusive to describe this process.[20] I am concerned here with only two—the translation and anthropological models—and I argue in this book that the latter is the preferred model in the postmodern world of diversity.

Translation Model

This model stresses the paramount position of the Christian message; it assumes a supracultural Christian core that is in some way or other independent of cultural and linguistic expressions. The task of the theologian is merely to translate or adapt this unchanging Gospel message into idioms of different cultures. Since there is little or no concern to discover though a process of authentic dialogue those "seeds of the Word" already present in cultures, this model of theologizing is best

19. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter "Mission of the Redeemer" (Boston: St. Paul Books, n.d.), 54.

20. See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

suited for people who are already practicing Christians.[21] Three different types of the translation model can be identified.

- Superficial dialogue

  In the decades prior to Vatican II the terms "adaptation," "accommodation," and "indigenization" became familiar in papal missionary writings. These terms mean that an evangelizer, usually an outsider, decides to use this or that custom as a pastoral tactic, generally without consulting the people, in order to make the Eurocentric expression of the faith more locally acceptable. For example, the priest could add local symbols to Mass vestments to project a degree of local authenticity. The act of worship or theological expression can then appear, it is hoped, to the local people as *their* worship or theology. This allows for a superficial or token form of dialogue, but a genuine exchange is neither possible nor theologically necessary. In 1951 Pope Pius XII insisted that the evangelizer's "office does not demand that they transplant European civilization and culture, and no other, to foreign soil."[22] Despite these inspiring words, little could be done to stop the transplanting of "European civilization and culture" as long as local churches were forbidden to have authentic theological exchange between interacting cultures.

- No dialogue

  In the first type of translation some form of dialogue is possible, but not essential. However, adherents of this second type insist that dialogue is not only unnecessary but even dangerous to truth. This is the position of the followers of what is termed Radical Orthodoxy. Theological truth is confined to the church alone, as all cultures are inherently corrupt; thus any form of dialogue with cultures is theologically out of the question. Anglican theologians like John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, D. Stephen Long, and Graham Ward are representatives of this view, along with some Catholic thinkers. Milbank believes that the theology of Vatican II has naturalized the supernatural, "reducing the transcendent to a

21. See ibid., 30–42.

22. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter "On Promoting Missions" (*Evangelii Praecones*), 1951, in *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa,* ed. Raymond Hickey (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 99.

dimension of our own human being."[23] He singles out the social sciences as especially dangerous. Liberation theology, for all its efforts to combat injustices, has given too much credence to these sciences and to the role of the state.[24] In her criticism of Long, Rosemary Radford Ruether goes to the heart of the issue when she points out that he "exaggerates Western history of thought into a dualism of normative truth . . . on the one hand, and fallacious modernity . . . on the other."[25] This simplistic dualism, with its sweeping demonization of secular movements, runs contrary to the fundamental reality of the incarnation. While not ignoring humankind's proneness to sin, nonetheless our faith in the incarnation tells us that goodness, no matter what its source, is a gift of the Spirit. What we see, and touch, the finite and the historical—all are capable of being instruments of the divine presence.[26]

- Dialogue with preconditions

  A third group of theologians accepts the translation model and agrees that dialogue is an essential requirement of theological thinking. The group includes Karl Barth (and contemporary followers), Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), but they insist that prolonged dialogue cannot begin until theologians have clarified and affirmed the uniqueness of Christianity. Theology must first be systematically ordered into a neatly bound whole and dialogue will not change this prestructured identity. Theologian David Tracy defines their position in this way: Catholic theology "needs to clarify and affirm its unique identity *as such* and not in correlation with the ever-shifting and dangerous contours of the contemporary situation."[27]

23. For a critique see Steven Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2007).

24. See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 101–40.

25. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Postmodern as Premodern: The Theology of D. Stephen Long," in *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy,"* eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 78.

26. See Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 10.

27. David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 554. Italics in original.

> There are several dangers in this position. Unless theologians are able to be challenged by outsiders they can assume that accidental historical and cultural accretions are as important as fundamental dogmas. Second, and more important, the identity of Christianity is not something that transcends cultures, languages, and history. Identities can never be static. They must always be modified according to changing contexts (chap. 5). As Paul Ricoeur says, consciousness is not a given, but a task to be achieved.[28] As explained, John Paul II has spoken extensively on the need for inculturation (chap. 9), for example: "I have considered the dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area . . . In order to evangelize effectively, it is necessary to have resolutely an attitude of exchange and of comprehension. The power of the Gospel must penetrate to the very heart of different cultures."[29] Bevans, however, concludes that John Paul II in his many references to inculturation is also primarily favoring this type of the translation model with its restricted acceptance of dialogue. Uppermost in the mind of the pope, says Bevans, is the need to preserve "the unity of the faith, and for him this can be accomplished only by emphasizing a primary universality of ecclesial communion and doctrinal expression."[30]

Anthropological Model

This model, significantly supported by the incarnational emphasis in the documents of Vatican II, especially The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), highlights the need to dialogue with cultures in order to discover the "seeds" of the Word as the stepping stone to explaining the full Gospel of Christ. John O'Malley, SJ, argues that the council introduced a new style of discourse that is "more inclined to reconciliation with human culture than to alienation from it, more inclined to see goodness than sin."[31] Unlike the translation model, the anthropological model sets no preconditions for dialogue. For this reason it is especially

28. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, eds. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 170.

29. John Paul II, "Letter to Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, on Occasion of the Creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed. (28 June 1982), 7.

30. See Bevans, *Models*, 44.

31. John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (London: Belknap Press, 2008), 310–11.

relevant in today's postmodern globalizing world. It relies significantly on the social sciences and interreligious dialogue to uncover the presence of the Word acting within cultures.

Contemporary thinkers like Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Edward Schillebeeckx, and David Tracy follow St. Thomas Aquinas in emphasizing the urgency for dialogue through *correlation* with cultures. Their aim is "to correlate issues raised by Christian faith and practice with other approaches to those issues"[32] in the secular world. Tillich, for example, shows how religious symbols correlate with the basic questions people raise about the meaning of life in politics, economics, art, and science.[33] Correlation is possible only if theologians are prepared to enter into dialogue without any prestructured systematic way of relating Christianity to the world. Reflecting on the positive impact of postmodern thinking on theology, Tracy writes: "Theology will never again be tameable by a system. . . . For theology does not bespeak a totality. Christian theology, at its best is the voice of the Other through all those others who have tasted . . . the Infinity disclosed in the kenotic reality of Jesus Christ."[34] As the New Testament accepts many theologies, so must we; to be authentic in this tradition is "to be free and open to the totality of the Gospel."[35] To follow exclusively only certain paths is to remove ourselves from the possibility of dialogue with a postmodern world of diversity.

Obstacles to Inculturation

Confusion about Meaning

Several leading theologians have expressed critical views of inculturation. Aloysius Pieris, SJ, an authority on Asian non-Christian religions, argues that some explanations of inculturation assume a false dichotomy between culture and religion, with most unfortunate consequences in Asia. Inculturation is frequently interpreted as the insertion of "the Christian religion minus European culture" into an "Asian culture

32. David F. Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.

33. See Paul Tillich, "On the Idea of a Theology of Culture," trans. William B. Green, in *What Is Religion?* ed. James L. Adams (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

34. David Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," *Theology Today* 51 (1994), 114.

35. Boff, *Church*, 77.

minus non-Christian religion."[36] But religion in Asia cannot be separated from culture. Moreover, inculturation in Asia has not yet been understood to embrace the desperate urgency for liberation from poverty.[37] He further comments: "Inculturation-fever might appear to be a desperate last-minute bid to give an Asian façade to a church that fails to strike roots in Asian soil because no one dares to break the Greco-Roman pot in which it has been existing for four centuries like a stunted *bonsai*!"[38]

Pieris is not against inculturation, but he is criticizing the neglect of in-depth theological reflection and the failure to do appropriate cultural analysis in Asia. Inculturation must focus on a Christology involving people who are poor and marginalized in Asia. In deeply moving words he writes that we have to learn how to "*discover* the Christhood of the Asian poor who, like Jesus, have no decent place to be born in (Luke 2:7), no reputable place to live and work in (John 1:46), no safe place in their own country to hide from oppressive rulers (Matt 2:13-14) or no honourable place to die in (Luke 23:23) and no place of their own to be buried in (Matt 27:59)."[39] If this Christology is recognized, Pieris says, the church *in* Asia will at last become the church *of* Asia.[40]

Father Peter Phan, also a missiologist with deep Asian roots, likewise correctly criticizes a superficial approach to inculturation. "Liberation without inculturation . . . sees humans simply as economic beings, while inculturation without liberation becomes an elistist, antiquarian quest irrelevant to people's lives."[41] He writes that "even the early attempts to 'inculturate' Christianity by missionaries such as Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili, and Alexandre de Rhodes, as well as by Asian theologians, laudable as those attempts have been, amount to no more than trimming rather than transplanting the Christian tree" into Asian soil.[42] Stephen Bevans prefers to use the term "contextualization" because it includes "the realities of contemporary secularity, technology, and the

36. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 52.

37. See Paul Knitter, "Foreword," in ibid., xiii.

38. Pieris, *Asian Theology of Liberation*, 53.

39. Aloysius Pieris, "Does Christ have a Place in Asia? A Panoramic View," *Concilium* 2 (1993): 43. Italics in original.

40. See ibid., 42–47.

41. Peter Phan, "Reception of Vatican II in Asia: Historical and Theological Analysis," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 276.

42. Peter Phan, "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 424.

struggle for human justice."[43] However, the term "inculturation" does embrace these realities and it continues to be more widely used among theologians than contextualization.

In 1995 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger favored the word "interculturality" rather than inculturation.[44] There is confusion here because interculturality is technically a term of cultural anthropology, while inculturation is a theological term. As explained, interculturality, which is the initial contact between two cultures, is only the first, but critical, stage in inculturation. At this stage there must be a willingness to understand the other person's culture. If this is lacking, people cannot proceed to the stage of dialogue. Bishop Francisco Claver, SJ, an experienced cultural anthropologist in the Philippines, agrees with this conclusion, arguing that the neglect of this intercultural stage "killed—or at least delayed for centuries—the inculturation of the faith in Asia."[45] Back in the sixteenth century the Jesuit Matteo Ricci and his companions, on first making contact with Chinese culture and Confucianism, recognized the need for a lengthy and uncertain dialogue based on mutual respect. Given what they had learned at the intercultural stage, they understood that they could not impose on Chinese people a faith mixed with European values and customs.[46] Ricci's efforts were condemned by Rome in 1742, meaning that the hard-won victory by St. Paul at the Council of Jerusalem in favor of inculturation had been put aside. The evangelizing effort of the church in Asia and elsewhere would consequently suffer for centuries to come.

Continuing Centralized Control

Vatican II laid the theological foundations for the reemergence of a more flexible, apostolic relationship between the Gospel and cultures, the type of openness that had characterized the missionary life of the early church. The Word of God is actively present within cultures before evangelization;[47] the church is not to be a huge, uniform monolith of

43. Bevans, *Models*, 21.

44. See Joseph Ratzinger, "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures," *Origins* (30 March 1995), 681. He returns to this theme in his lecture reflecting on John Paul II's encyclical "Faith and Reason" (*Fides et Ratio*). See "Culture and Truth: Reflections on the Encyclical," *Origins*, 28, no. 36 (25 February 1999), 629.

45. Francisco F. Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 121.

46. See George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1985).

47. See GS 1.

Eurocentric cultural characteristics, but a fraternity of local churches, each of which seeks to give life to the universal church in accordance with the native genius and tradition of its own members;[48] bishops are "vicars and delegates of Christ" (LG 27), not of the pope, and are endowed with the appropriate authority to govern their dioceses; there must be a "vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures" (GS 44), so that through this dialogue and exchange local expressions of worship and theology may emerge; genuine dialogue requires that people be open to listen to one another, thus taking every means possible to learn about the cultures of the people to be involved in the dialogue.[49] These are the council's theological underpinnings for what we now call inculturation.

However, the restorationist movement in the church (as explained in chaps. 8 and 9), with its reaffirmation of pre-Vatican II structures and attitudes and an anti-world-culture approach, is obstructing inculturation efforts.[50] The document Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy, promulgated in 1994, exemplifies this restorationist approach by Rome. Early in the document it refers optimistically to inculturation as a "double movement" and says that the liturgy "must be capable of expressing itself in every human culture," but the same document significantly limits the powers originally given to bishops and episcopal conferences in matters of liturgical experimentation.[51] In 2001 Rome issued *Liturgiam Authenticam*, a document firmly asserting that Rome has the right to intervene in liturgical matters. It undermines what is at the center of Vatican II ecclesiology by centralizing power in the curia and by demanding that local cultures implement an essentially Roman form of worship.[52] The curia-centered control is not confined to liturgical matters but embraces all aspects that relate to faith and culture, including such matters as interreligious dialogue and social justice.[53] In 1979 Karl Rahner had sadly complained: "Do not the

48. See *SC* 35.

49. See the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*) 22.

50. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 3–4.

51. See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy" (1994), 1, 6, 47, 66; comments by Nathan Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," *Worship* 68 (July 1994): 369–76; and David N. Power, "Liturgy and Culture Revisited," *Worship* 69 (May 1995): 225–43.

52. See John L. Allen, "New Document Replaces 35 Years of Liturgy Work," *National Catholic Reporter* (25 May 2001), 13.

53. See Submission of Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to the 1985 Bishops' Synod, *The Tablet* (3 August 1985), 814, and Robert Schreiter, "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (December 1989), 758.

Roman Congregations still have the mentality of a centralized bureaucracy which thinks it knows best what serves the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls throughout the world . . . [taking] Rome or Italy in a frightening naïve way as a self-evident standard?"[54] Forty years later the situation remains the same. Not surprisingly, Michael Amaladoss, SJ, director of the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions in India, concludes that "the process of inculturation is not making much headway in the Church today because it is mostly seen as the translation and adaptation of a pre-existent 'pure' gospel" that has a "privileged and normative expression in Judaic and Greco-Roman cultures."[55]

Case Study: Inclusive Language

In 1969 Rome published an official guide for translators of liturgical texts[56] in which the principle of "dynamic equivalence" receives substantial approval.[57] This principle gives priority to the message of the biblical text over its original linguistic form.[58] That is, in the translation of texts for worship priority is to be given to the cultural context. For example, two critical contemporary cultural issues are the changing role of women and the development of the English language as influenced by social change.[59] Both movements insist on inclusive language. We should expect to find these changes mirrored in the church's public worship. This is not the case.[60] Rome still continues to block efforts to have inclusive language in the liturgy.

54. Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (December 1979): 717–18.

55. Michael Amaladoss, "Liturgical Inculturation and Postmodern Culture," 2, http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr007/amaladoss.htm.

56. See *Comme le prévoit,* 1969. English text in *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963–1979*, ed. Thomas O'Brien, 284–91 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982).

57. See Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 43–47.

58. A point reinforced by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 63.

59. See Mary Collins, *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1987), 197–214.

60. In 2007 Rome granted permission to the Canadian Catholic bishops to use the NRSV.

Inculturation as a Social Drama

We are now able to look more closely at the stages of inculturation as a process (Figure 11.1).

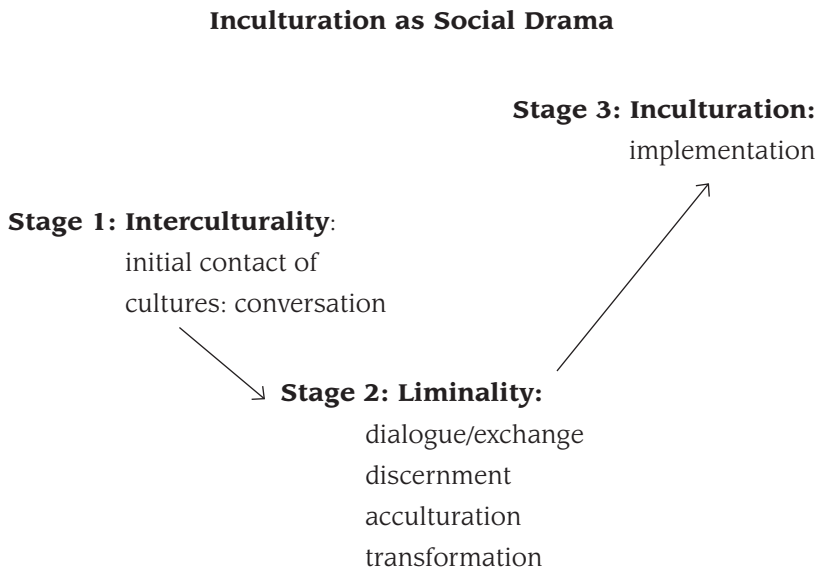

Figure 11.1

The process of inculturation follows the pattern of a social drama (chap. 10), although the stages may not always be explicitly delineated as now described. The first stage is interculturality,[61] which takes the form of an opening conversation. This initial stage is important because in it the parties to the conversation become aware that their cultures are different. A decision must be made by both parties either to stop or to continue the conversation. When the Samaritan woman and Jesus meet at Jacob's well they represent two different cultures (John 4:7-10). There is tension in the air. Jesus asks for water and the woman has to reply (v. 9). Then the crucial liminality stage with all its uncertainties begins and the conversation moves to a dialogue, that is, to a more focused form of conversation in which there is an open exchange of views (vv. 10-26).

61. I agree with Francisco Claver in his use of interculturality. See Claver, *Making of a Local Church*, 120–21.

A faith discernment is taking place. The parties now have a greater awareness of the presence and activity of God within themselves and in the world around them: "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Eph 2:10). Increasingly alert to God's presence the Samaritan woman realizes that her acculturation or acceptance of Christ's narrative must mean a change in her behavior. Is she prepared for this transformation? She must abandon attachment to aspects of her Samaritan mythology. She assents and immediately goes to share her joy with others. This is the inculturation stage.

Case Study: Option for the Poor

At a regular meeting of a management board responsible for several Catholic hospitals in the United States, the directors, who consist of successful businessmen and businesswomen, must decide either to buy a new hospital that would significantly improve the board's financial resources or to invest instead in a facility in a needy low-income suburb. If they choose the second option the board will have to subsidize its running costs, as the new facility could never pay for itself. The first alternative is more attractive from a financial and a prestige perspective. Initially board members favor this option—that is, until they begin a discernment process. Following their lengthy reflections on the Good Samaritan parable, which emphasizes the needs of people who are poor, the board votes unanimously to purchase the health facility.

I was asked to help the directors reflect on how they had come to their decision. Without being aware of it, they in fact had followed the tripartite steps of a social drama. Stage one, *interculturality*, was the awareness by the directors of a clash between two opposing mythologies: that of the business world, primarily focused on profit, and that of the Gospel with its emphasis on a preferential option for the poor. The *liminal* stage was characterized by dialogue and discernment. Directors agreed that their reflection on the parable was the key moment in their decision making. One director, skilled in contemporary research into the nature of poverty, had helped them to discover that immaterial consequences of poverty such as shame and loss of self-respect can be devastating for people. As a consequence of this realization other directors admitted that the suffering of the poverty-stricken traveler left on the roadside had a

new meaning for them. They could see that an exchange had occurred between the mythologies of the business world and the Scriptures. Both had become enriched. The *acculturation* part of the liminal stage was the decision to choose the parable's primary concern for people who are disadvantaged. The actual buying of the hospital was the final *inculturation* moment.

Case Study: Family *or* Justice

In the mid-1960s I was researching the impact of credit unions on villagers in Fiji, a Third-World country. A credit union is a group of people who pledge themselves to save together and then lend their savings to one another at the lowest possible interest rates. There are strict accounting rules within a credit union: for example, family relationships must not dictate who can receive a loan or when it should be repaid. There is, however, an ancient custom among Fijians called *kerekere*, which is the practice of "borrowing" from kinsfolk at the will of the borrower in times of material misfortune. It had a distinctive beneficial role in a subsistence economy because it helped to spread consumption goods more evenly, but among people struggling to enter a money economy the custom was being abused. An official report noted that the custom now put "a premium on laziness and is often a serious or even disastrous drain on those Fijians who are endeavoring to accumulate and to invest."[62] I wanted to know if *kerekere* was being practiced in credit unions. Were people charged with assessing applications for loans being forced by relatives to agree to the requests, and did people renege on repaying loans on the basis of *kerekere*?

My research revealed that credit unions were not being significantly affected by the custom, the main reason being the ease with which villagers could integrate the lessons of biblical stories into the drama of their decision-making processes. It was not unusual for a spokesperson for a credit union to comment somewhat as follows:

62. O. H. K. Spate, *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects* (Suva: Legislative Council, 1959), 24; see also Gerald A. Arbuckle, "Economic and Social Development in the Fiji Islands through Credit Unions," in *Credit Unions in the South Pacific*, ed. Neil Runcie, 90–108 (London: University of London Press, 1969).

> Yes, we are tempted to give way to the demands of *kerekere.* It is not easy. But Scripture tells us that we must behave with fairness to everyone, whether a relative or not. The stories that Jesus told are about being honest, and *kerekere* in a credit union is not being honest. It is hard to do this, because relatives can become very angry, but that is what Jesus wants. We Fijians traditionally hold that only people belonging to our tribes or clans are brothers. This is wrong, as we see in the Good Samaritan story.

The social drama in a credit union opened when the committee responsible for assessing applications for loans met. In the liminal phase the committee would have to assess the merits of the applicants for loans. Did the applications conform to the requirements of credit union? In the cases I examined there were identifiable stages: the intercultural clash between traditional village mythology and that of the Scriptures; dialogue; then the acculturation of the biblical mythology; finally the refusal to be influenced by *kerekere*, despite the anger of relatives, that is, inculturation. The refusal was the moment of inculturation.

Inculturation and Syncretism

Syncretism

Inculturation is social drama but it is also narrative. Narratives, as already described (chap. 6), are crucial agents that invest events with meaning, and as these events change, so do the narratives. In the drama of inculturation people are telling their stories of what it means for them to wrestle with the tension between their own cultural narratives and those of the gospels. At times syncretism is almost a predictable characteristic of this storytelling.

Syncretism evokes fear, particularly in those with authority within the institutional church. For example, the Vatican II document The Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*) warns that any adaptation of the faith to local cultures must "avoid every appearance of syncretism and false exclusiveness" (AG 23).[63] Here syncretism is being used in its

63. See also the concern expressed by the Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla in 1979 (*Puebla and Beyond*, eds. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979], 186, 241).

theological sense to mean an unacceptable amalgam of religious beliefs and practices, something to be identified and immediately destroyed by church authorities.[64] Yet anthropologically, syncretism as a quality of cultural change is largely inevitable.[65] At no point in time is there ever a pure Christianity. It has never existed and never will. The fact is that both the faith of Israel and the faith of the first Christian generations developed through processes of inculturation involving at times some syncretism in assimilating influences of other cultures.[66] It would take centuries of struggle for Israel to be clear about what was acceptable to God in the culture and religion of Canaan.

Syncretism is most likely to occur within the liminal stage of the inculturation drama as people evaluate the Christian mythology through the eyes of their own traditions. This is a lengthy and uneven process, and the people's narratives are forever changing. At the same time the mythologies and rituals of the local church must themselves be adapting to these changes if they are to be relevant to people. Pope Gregory the Great (540–604) provides a fascinating description of how slow this process can be and the wisdom and patience needed by representatives of the institutional church. In his advice to Abbot Mellitus, a fellow missionary of St. Augustine of Canterbury, the pope not only invokes the importance of functional substitution but also reminds him that the inculturation process is very slow. He is implicitly saying that syncretism is inevitable in the stages toward inculturation and that this is pastorally acceptable:

> The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. . . . In this way we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and

64. See Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 360; for clarifications and criteria for assessing authentic Christian identity see Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 62–83.

65. See Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, 360–61: Boff, *Church*, 89–107; and André Droogers, "Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," in *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, eds. Jerald Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels, 7–25 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

66. See Silvia Schroer, "Transformation of Faith: Documents of Intercultural Learning in the Bible," *Concilium* 2 (1994): 3–13; Boff, *Church*, 92.

> adore the true God. . . . For it is impossible to eradicate all errors at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb up a mountain top climbs gradually step by step and not in one leap.[67]

We, like Abraham, are called to let go of so much that is culturally familiar and comforting (Gen 12:1), and the journey will be uncertain, long, and at times tortuous.[68] Consider the drama of Jesus' relationship with Peter, one so close to Jesus yet so slow to let go. Simon Peter, with a burst of initial enthusiasm, "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Yet we quickly find Peter not understanding the words and intentions of Jesus (e.g., John 13:6-11; 18:10-11), still thinking and acting according to his former beliefs, sinking because he lacks faith (Matt 14:28-31), being vigorously rebuked as "Satan" (Mark 8:33). All the while Jesus is challenging, instructing, and waiting. Finally Peter's conversion comes, but with enormous pain (Luke 22:61-62). Jesus calls us not as pure spirits but as embodied in flesh and culture. This holistic conversion is a protracted and uncertain process of letting go.

The following case study from Papua New Guinea helps to clarify the highly complex process of Christian conversion in which syncretism is an integral stage in the cultural drama. It simply illustrates the fact that the inculturation process outlined can take decades simply because conversion to Christianity demands such radical changes in a people's traditional mythology. And of course, ultimate conversion is never certain.

Case Study: Melanesia

The people of Papua New Guinea, South Pacific, who belong to the cultural complex known as Melanesia, did not make any significant contact with the outside world until the late nineteenth century and for some tribes not until the mid-twentieth century. Traditionally Melanesian people distinguish between purely secular skills and "true knowledge." Purely secular skills are things that, given time, anyone can discover in the course of ordinary experience. By "true knowledge," however, the people mean the mastery of ritual, such as sorcery, the correct performance of which ensures the spirits bring them health and success in economic, social, and

67. Gregory the Great cited by Anthony Gittins, "Beyond Liturgical Inculturation," 62–63.

68. I researched in Papua New Guinea 1970–72. I am grateful for the insights of my late colleague and fellow anthropologist, Father Hermann Janssen, MSC.

political action. The spirits and human beings live together in a purely physical world and there is no distinction between the natural and supernatural; the power and actions of spirit-beings are as real and alive as the world we see. People believe that through the use of "right rituals" based on "true knowledge" they are able to manipulate the ancestors in their favor. If material wealth and power do not result, it is due to the fact that the wrong rituals have been used or they have been inaccurately recited. They do not question the underlying mythology. Millennial movements, called locally "cargo cults,"[69] are an integral feature of Melanesian cultures; these movements are built on the assumption that the ancestors will dramatically arrive in planes or boats bringing desirable produce *provided*, as always, people discover the correct rituals.

The long social drama of inculturation for Melanesian people begins when people first make contact with Christian missionaries. In this *intercultural* stage there is a period of initial apprehension, then enthusiasm that the contact will result in material benefits. There is enthusiasm akin to that Peter initially experienced in his conversion of faith. This is followed by the lengthy liminal phase in which it is possible to distinguish four stages of acculturation. The first is *ritualistic conversion*. People, believing that Christianity contains the secret knowledge, faithfully imitate externally the ways of missionaries in the hope that this will reveal the secret knowledge and the path to economic and political success. People abandon traditional rituals, for example ancestral cults, and enthusiastically adopt Christian rituals such as rosary beads and going to Mass. Despite the external changes the belief that ritual is the secret way to material achievement remains intact and unchallenged.[70]

The next stage of acculturation is *formal syncretism*. After some years people become disappointed that Christianity does not bring the results they are waiting for. The missionaries, they believe, are hiding the real secret knowledge from them and they begin again to fear the ancestors are punishing them for their neglect of traditional ways. A person's narrative lament summarizes this general

69. For helpful analyses see Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (London: Methuen, 1960).

70. See Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 79.

reaction: "We worshiped the Christian God, where is the rice, the jeeps, nothing at all? We sent our children to the mission schools, where is the canned fish?" There is now a blending of traditional and Christian rituals, but the underlying traditional mythology remains unchanged, namely that the right ritual will bring results, if only it can be found. "Cargo cults" with their syncretistic qualities become common at this stage; people neglect or entirely abandon secular activities and give their full attention to the syncretistic rituals.[71]

The third stage of acculturation is *ritualistic secularization*. This involves a radical switch from the belief that the mixture of traditional and Christian rituals will bring the people the desired secret ritual knowledge. Now secular activities of government officials and foreign business people, not the Christian religion, contain the secret knowledge and people begin to imitate their behavior and ignore their previous syncretistic rituals. People abandon churches and Christian rituals. One person summarizes this stage: "If we follow the government laws and grow better coconut trees, the secret will be ours." There is a dramatic burst of enthusiasm for education, economic development, and involvement in government politics. As before, there is no change in traditional mythology, but only in the external ritual practices.

The last stage of acculturation is the decision either for a lasting rejection of Christianity or the conversion to Christian secularization. Christianity is no technology; God cannot be manipulated as people thought they could do with their ancestors. In Christian secularization Melanesians come to believe that they are instruments of Christ's incarnation and redemption within their own cultural milieu, the fruits of which are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22). Their task is to develop the resources given them by God for the benefit of all. Christian rituals and beliefs are not enough. Action must follow, and when this is happening the last stage of the drama is occurring, namely inculturation.

71. See ibid., 63–85.

Theological Reflection

While this chapter has shown that in theory Rome is open to the theological and cultural implications of inculturation, in practice, given the restorationist tendencies, it is not. It is not prepared to critique its own Eurocentric and patriarchal culture. Inculturation remains a dream as long as the institutional church is unwilling to accept the fact that it is now a global and multicultural reality in which the majority of its adherents have ceased to be of European origin. Inculturation is an arduous process, but it is an imperative of our faith, calling us to a cultural and spiritual conversion and to a pilgrimage to where we "do not wish to go" (John 21:18).

But the call of Jesus Christ is the same as that given to Peter: "Follow me" (John 21:19). We will follow if we "have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). We cannot foretell in advance what God may reveal about us and the cultures we must dialogue with, or how God will act. What we do know is that in order to begin, and remain in, the pilgrimage of inculturation we need to know who we are as church. Then we will begin to understand the essential and the accidental in our identity and discern what, as faithful pilgrims, we must courageously abandon.

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